

Striking a balance

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Wealth and prosperity should not make individuals forget their religious pursuits, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today, arguing that only a balanced approach between religion and material progress could ensure lasting success.

The Prime Minister said affluence had often led people to relegate religion to the backyard as they enjoyed life.

There is nothing wrong in enjoying life as long as one's duties to God are not neglected.

Dr Mahathir was responding to questions from participants at the international seminar on the role of religion in society, organised by the Institute of Islamic Understanding (Ikim) and the Goethe Institute Kuala Lumpur here.

Society needs to cling to religious values which will make individuals more balanced persons in the pursuit of material wealth while not forgetting the hereafter.

Citing the Malaysian example, the Prime Minister said there was now greater awareness of religious matters, with equally increasing desire to adhere to religious principles and teachings.

He said: "I see a lot more people wearing skullcaps.

"While this does not necessarily reflect a more religious outlook, it does show that more people are more aware of their religious responsibilities.

Role and influence of religions in society



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"Of course this doesn't mean that those who are not wearing skullcaps are less religious."

Asked whether there would be anything from the religious point of view that could obstruct the country from achieving the targets set under Vision 2020, he said it was important for everyone in the country to work in harmony at all times.

Adherence to religious principles will make everyone more tolerant, and this forms an important element in the country's attempt to become a fully developed nation by 2020.

"We must get rid of suspicious minds that may still exist in our society.

"This is important.

"To do this, we must cling to religion, to strong religious values...we must be guided by tolerance and awareness."

Getting rid of suspicions has never been easy. But this can be done by getting the intellectuals to discuss religion in a non-emotional way.

This can help promote greater enlightenment all round.

Asked on the role of women in 2020, Dr Mahathir said:

"Women in this country will always play a significant role in nation building.

"If you cast women aside,

then you're automatically weakening the nation because women constitute a big portion of the workforce."

During the two-hour dialogue spiced with humour and some frank observations, Dr Mahathir said women in Malaysia were quite liberated and free to go about doing their business.

"We like women to be free here...not the kind of freedom that one sees some men enjoy...just because some men are unfaithful doesn't mean that women have to be unfaithful too.

"There are restrictions for women drawn from religious teachings.

"Take the case of miniskirts. Some women may like it...Muslim women may not go for it because of their religious restrictions.

"But women are free to become lawyers, doctors, engineers...if they want to cover their heads and fly an aircraft, go ahead.

"We treat women the way they should be treated..."

Ikim chairman Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid said the dialogue would be properly documented and distributed as soon as possible because it contained messages useful to Muslims and non-Muslims everywhere in the world.

for lasting success