

PM: Malaysians are becoming more religious

By WONG CHUN WAI

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysians of all faiths are becoming more religious even though they are growing richer, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

The Prime Minister said the Government had always stressed the need for a balance between development and values.

He said that over the years, the Government had noted that Malaysians were turning more to religion.

"This is a good thing. When we talk about Vision 2020, we stress moral values, not just per capita income of US\$14,000," he told participants at a seminar here.

He was answering questions from the floor in a two-hour dialogue

with the participants after opening the seminar jointly organised by the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (Ikim) and the Goethe Institute.

Over a hundred local and foreign academics are attending the four-day seminar on *The Role and Influence of Religions In Society*.

Dr Mahathir said there was a trend among Muslims to wear white caps and to cover their heads, a manifestation of their adherence to religion.

Among the Christians, he added, congregations were held not just in formal churches but also in residential houses.

"Hindus and Taoists have also shown much more awareness and de-

PM: Don't advocate violence

FROM PAGE ONE

sire to adhere to religion," he said.

Dr Mahathir believed Malaysians would not forget their religions even when the country became more prosperous.

The Prime Minister was asked whether there was a danger of Malaysia losing its values and religion as it became more affluent, as what had happened to the West.

Dr Mahathir also spoke on the need for tough leg-

islation to deal with religious extremists who advocated the use of violence.

"We have Muslim groups who feel that the Government is not practising Islam the way it should be. They can criticise, but if they advocate violence, we will step in," he warned.

On the role of women in Islam, the Prime Minister they should not be sidelined as they could contribute to society.

He said the Govern-

ment would have to appoint more women judges because there were now more women studying law than men.

"Women are encouraged to play a role. If they want to cover their head to pilot a plane, that's fine so long as they can hear," he quipped.

Dr Mahathir also called for a "meeting of Muslim and Christian minds" at the seminar to help correct misconceptions and distorted views of each other.

TURN TO PAGE 3