

04/04/1997

Averting global cultural conflict

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Dismissing the "clash of civilisations" scenario predicting the Cold War would be succeeded by a global cultural conflict, German President Roman Herzog regarded this scenario as "academically and ethically questionable".

"If it is disseminated by the media and becomes established in the minds of the elites," he said, "it could easily become a self-fulfilling prophecy."

Herzog, here for a five-day state visit with a 100-member delegation, was addressing a public lecture "Towards a Common Civilisation" at the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia.

Herzog said Asia, Europe and America had an equal interest to combat the intellectual misconceptions in this "clash of civilisations" where cultural and religious conflicts arise between countries.

Germany's University of Tuebingen director of the Institute of Ecumenical Research, Prof Hans Keung, presented a paper that responded to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir's speeches delivered at the Global Panel at the Hague last year, the Beijing Dialogue and at the Third Pacific Dialogue in Kuala Lumpur.

Keung said Islamic civilisation was threatened by all sorts of cultural and religious conflicts between specific countries, often in the same city, street and school.

Peace in the Western and Islamic world, he claimed, was threatened by various religious fundamentalism.

"We live in a time where better relations between religions were blocked by all sorts of dogmatisms," he said.

The alternative, Keung said, was peace and dialogue among the religions and an ethical minimum common to all religions, cultures and civilisations.

The other presenter was University of Georgetown visiting professor, Malaysian Chair of Islam in Southeast Asia, Prof Mohd Kamal Hassan.

He said the 210 million Muslims in Southeast Asia and the existence of Asean with its own commitment to regional ethics of co-operation contributed to the maintenance of inter-religious harmony.

In search for common and ethical ground, Mohd Kamal said the following issues needed to be addressed: the new world order, globalisation, enlightenment heritage or the hidden agenda of modernism and the Islamic threat: myth or reality.

After the talks, a 30-minute dialogue chaired by Ikim chairman Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid took place between the speakers and participants.

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