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Dr M urges Muslim countries to have own media network

Tengku Sariffuddin; Hayati Hayatudin

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Muslim countries should establish their own media network to counter Western media biased against Islam.

He said they have the financial resources to set up newspapers and television stations including to purchase satellites.

He said, however, Muslims have to learn and master the technology if they were to succeed.

"We must also learn the technique of using the technology in which we are weak including all Malaysians ... to try and be more effective in using the media.

"We can broadcast what Islam really is," he said.

Dr Mahathir was replying to a question by participants during an hour dialogue session after delivering a keynote address at the "The Islamic World and Global Co-operation: Preparing for the 21st century" symposium at Sunway Lagoon Resort hotel.

The Prime Minister was asked how Muslim countries should counter the powerful Western media which was biased against Islam by portraying the religion in a negative light.

Dr Mahathir pointed out that Western media use the word Muslim terrorists but not terrorists of the other religions.

They did not call the Irish Republican Army or Peru rebels as Christian terrorists or the Japanese as Buddhist terrorists, he said.

"If a person happens to be Muslim and commits something, he is immediately called a Muslim terrorist."

Dr Mahathir said the Western media have the tendency to slant the reports to serve their interests, adding that they misused their power in making inaccurate reports.

"There is a saying that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

"The media is more powerful than a Prime Minister and if it is more powerful it must also be more corrupt and that is what we see today," he said.

Replying to another question, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia has rejected several requests by the Israeli Government to establish diplomatic ties as it has not fulfilled agreements in the peace accord signed with Palestinian Liberalisation Organisation.

However, the Government would engage in efforts to bring about a change in the perception of Israelis especially its youths toward Islam.

He said the Government had allowed the visits by a group of Israel youths and cricket team recently so they could see that peaceful co-existence in a multi-religious society such as in Malaysia was possible.

He said if the majority of Israelis could see that Islam was a peace loving religion they would reject the extremists element and leaders within their ranks.

"We are not happy with Israel's (Government) attitude ... we are not having diplomatic relations with Israel although they have asked several times," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Muslims in the country should not be worried of their own existence provided they remain united and were able to compete.

They should acquire knowledge, technology and skills to enhance their own position to avoid dependence on others, he added.

Asked on the need for a better understanding between Muslims, Dr Mahathir said much progress has been made as there were now frequent discussions among the countries.

He said, however, it was important discussions were not conducted with emotion as Muslims would then lose sight of their objective and strayed from the teaching of Islam.

He said there were Muslims who interpreted Islamic teachings to serve their interests when in fact it was contrary to the religion.

Citing the killing of 42 Algerian villagers reportedly by Islamic extremists yesterday, the Prime Minister said the killers were not fundamentalists.

"If they stick to the fundamentals of Islam, they will not slaughter fellow Muslims. This is the kind of situation that Muslims now face - people like these go around shouting God is Great and then slaughter people." he said.

On the threat of imperialism in the name of globalisation, Dr Mahathir said Muslim should guard against any attempt to impose this type of imperialism.

"Muslims have no need for imperialism but what is needed for us is to seize the opportunity presented by globalisation," he said.

On the role of Muslim women, Dr Mahathir said they cannot be taken away from the workforce as they are great contributors and without them, the country's strength would be in jeopardy.

Women had the skills and they contributed to the good of the community and the economy.

"We want our women to contribute to the economy and there is no reason why women should not work," he said.

In Malaysia the Muslim population is 53 per cent and from that, women make up 26.5 per cent.

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