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Dr Mahathir urges Muslims to project image of tolerance

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KOTA BARU, Fri. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Muslims should project an image of tolerance if they are to eliminate the negative picture of Islam that has been repeatedly painted by the Western media.

The Prime Minister added that they must not show the West that they are intolerant, fond of holding wild demonstrations and are not intelligent at all.

"Muslims must show the Jews, who control the international media, that we are normal human beings who live in peace," he said today when opening the KUB Tekstil Sdn Bhd factory at the Pengkalan Chepa Industrial area.

"Our relations with the other races, who are of different religions, are cordial."

Also present were Dr Mahathir's wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa, Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, Senate president Tan Sri Mohamed Yaacob, Deputy Menteri Besar Abdul Halim Abdul Rahman and senior Umno and Pas leaders.

Dr Mahathir explained why the Government wanted the Jews to know about the harmonious relations among the various races in Malaysia.

"At present, they (the Jews) do not know at all that there are good Muslims and that Muslims are not as insane as projected," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was important that Muslims exerted influence on Israel's politics.

He regretted that Muslims were too busy fighting among themselves and in the process ignored the plight of other Muslims living in Western countries.

He cited the plight of Muslim Turks in Germany who were apparently killed in several fires there.

"Our newspapers failed to highlight the issue although the fires involved only the homes of Turks," he said. "There seems to be an attempt to frighten Muslims away from the country."

Referring to the Umno-Pas rivalry, Dr Mahathir said Muslims were grateful that their political differences did not lead to violence or even killings unlike in certain countries.

"We can differ politically but Muslims cannot afford to be divided," he said. "We also cannot afford to be extremists because the people will suffer."

He referred to certain Muslim countries where political clashes were not only confined to public rallies but had also resulted in riots, boycotts and violence that included killings and even civil war.

On his visit to Kelantan today, Dr Mahathir described the situation as "unique but should not be politicised."

"It is a good development and we accept the fact that we differ politically but that should not be the reason for us to be divided," he said.

On increasing the number of Malay entrepreneurs, Dr Mahathir dismissed the notion that Malays were unable to conduct business as there were many who had excelled and were now millionaires and billionaires.

"At one time, we almost lost faith in our own ability in business because we had been colonised for too long," he said. "However, we have corrected the situation and we now know that a business will flourish if its proprietor manages it well."

Repeating the remarks when he opened Ain Medicare Pharmaceutical Complex about two kilometres away, Dr Mahathir said the Government was concentrating its efforts on increasing the number of middle-class Malays.

"This includes giving opportunities to Government employees to venture into business," he said. "We are also studying the use of franchising to encourage the growth of Malay entrepreneurs."

The franchise of Malay food, particularly satay, was one of the many possibilities as it was a favourite Malay food, Dr Mahathir said.

More importantly, Dr Mahathir pointed out, the gap between the rich and the poor must be narrowed to avoid envy and anger between the different races.

"We have been able to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor but greater efforts are needed to create more Malay middle-class income earners," he said.

Dr Mahathir urged big corporations to assist the Government in the process.

The Prime Minister later witnessed the signing of two agreements between Ain Medicare and Sino-Singapore Medical Disposables Pte Ltd and Remedi Pharmaceuticals Sdn Bhd.

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