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Help instil positive ethics, PM tells religious heads

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last night called on all religious leaders to instil positive ethics and morality among their followers and help make Malaysia a model of religious harmony.

He said they must ensure that their followers will consciously uphold their traditions, beliefs, morals and seek to live with the highest level of integrity so that the Malaysian society can be a model of attainable harmony between people divided by differences of religion.

"This will indeed be a great contribution from you (religious leaders and elders) to our own Malaysian society," he said at the 50th anniversary dinner of the Council of Churches in Kuala Lumpur.

Dr Mahathir said the role of religion is one of the factors that can address social ills and nurture the development of a united, strong and morally upright society.

"We all know that all religions teach their adherents to be good. Any religion that teaches its followers to be bad will be doomed. We have seen the mass destruction of human lives among various religious cults from time to time," he added.

He noted that Malaysia is very fortunate that its multi-racial and multi-religious society has long lived in harmony.

"This cooperation, regardless of race and religion, will further reinforce our capacity to build a more liberal and tolerant society," he added.

Dr Mahathir said, however, Malaysians could not afford to be complacent with their achievements, adding that they have to improve their cooperation and understanding as the nation moves forward towards a modern economic society.

"If we simply maintain what we have achieved, we may find that the challenges ahead will be too difficult for us to face, as there are forces within and without which will try to derail us," he added.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia practises tolerance and mutual respect, based on the teachings of Prophet Muhammad who was reported to have once stood in respect for a Jewish funeral which was passing in front of him.

"Our non-Muslim friends, such as the Buddhists and Hindus enjoy the freedom to live according to their cultural values and religious norms in a way that is not possible in many other countries," he said.

Dr Mahathir said violence as a means of solving inter-religious disputes is "abhorred by all religious communities and political parties in this democratic nation".

Citing an example, Dr Mahathir said the relationship between Islam and Buddhism in the predominantly Muslim state of Kelantan has been peaceful with the Buddhist community proudly preserving one of the biggest sleeping Buddha statues in South-East Asia, "a fact not known even by many Malaysians".

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