

26/04/1997

Instil positive ethics, religious leaders told

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight appealed to leaders and elders of all religions to instil positive ethics and morals among their followers to curb growing social problems.

"This is to ensure that each and every member of our society will consciously uphold our traditions, our beliefs, our morals," he said, "and seek to live with the highest level of integrity so that our society can be a model of attainable harmony between people divided by differences of religion."

Speaking at the Council of Churches' 50th anniversary dinner at the Putra World Trade Centre, the Prime Minister said Malaysia was now affected by social ills of "almost every conceivable type."

"The Government is trying its best to contain these ills," he said, "because we know that such ills can spread wildly and erode all our achievements."

He said Malaysians cannot afford to allow such ills to spread and weaken their social fabric and strength.

One factor that could nurture a united, strong and morally upright society was religion, he said.

Dr Mahathir said Christian ethics and morality were no different from that of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism or other religions.

This was evident by the adoption of a "Declaration Toward A Global Ethic" by the Parliament of the World's Religions in its centenary meeting in Chicago in 1993.

"We know that the Parliament of World Religions represents all religions that are being practised throughout the world," he said. "Faiths may differ but ethics and morality can be similar or even identical."

Looking beyond Malaysia's peaceful history, Dr Mahathir said it appeared that the prospect of a universal set of ethics, binding races, cultures, religions and traditions, was encouraging.

Therefore, Malaysians should work towards it by example and by precept, he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians were fortunate that its multi-racial and multi-religious society had a long experience and tradition of living in harmony.

"As a direct result, we have achieved tremendous economic progress that has considerably lifted the quality of life of our people," he said.

"This co-operation, regardless of race and religion, will further reinforce our capacity to build a more liberal and tolerant society."

However, Dr Mahathir said complacency should not set in.

Malaysians have to improve their co-operation and understanding as they move towards a more modern economic society.

"Islam," he said, "taught Muslims to allow complete freedom of worship to other religious groups willing to live in a Muslim country."

"Islam teaches us that all humans are created from the same parents, Adam and Eve," he said. "In Islam, there is no compulsion on matters of faith as everyone is free to make his own choice."

Despite religious differences, Dr Mahathir said the same respect should be accorded to all human beings.

He mentioned an incident when Prophet Muhammad stood in respect for a Jewish funeral procession in front of him.

When his companion asked the Prophet why he did so, the Prophet replied:

"He is as human as we are."

In another incident, a Jew used to place all the dirty things he could find on a street where the Prophet walked by.

"The Prophet had to be careful to avoid the dirt and filth when he passed that street," he said. "He asked of him and was told that the man was sick and remained in his house."

"The Prophet immediately paid him a visit which shocked the Jew, who asked why the Prophet did that after all that he had done.

"The Prophet replied: 'You are as human as I am'."

"It is based on such teachings," Dr Mahathir said, "that Malaysians practised tolerance and mutual respect.

"The relationship between Islam and Buddhism in a predominantly Muslim State of Kelantan for example has been peaceful with the Buddhist community proudly preserving one of the biggest sleeping Buddha statues in Southeast Asia, a fact not known even by many Malaysians.

"And the present Muslim Menteri Besar attends ceremonies in a Buddhist Wat," he said.

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