

25 APR 1997

Mahathir-Religion

INSTIL POSITIVE ETHICS AND MORALITY IN FOLLOWERS, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, April 25 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight appealed to all leaders and elders of all religions in the country to instil positive ethics and morality among their followers and help make Malaysia a model of religious harmony.

The prime minister said they must ensure that every member of the society would "consciously uphold their traditions, beliefs, morals 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".

"This will indeed be a great contribution from you to our own Malaysian society," he said at the Council of Churches' 50th anniversary dinner at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

Dr Mahathir said that in the wake of numerous social ills of almost every conceivable type affecting the country, the people could not afford to allow this to spread and weaken their social fabric and erode their strength.

"One of the factors that could nurture the development of a united, strong and morally upright society is the role of religion," he said.

The prime minister said that Christian ethics and morality were not different from Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist or other religious ethics and morality.

He said Malaysia was very fortunate that its multi-racial and multi-religious society had had a long experience and tradition of living in harmony.

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

However, Dr Mahathir said, Malaysians could not afford to be complacent with their achievements. He said they had to improve their cooperation and understanding as the nation moved forward towards a modern economic society.

He said: "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."

Although Malaysia is predominantly a Muslim country, the Islamic tenets required the Muslims to be tolerant towards other religious groups, the prime minister said, as he quoted the Quranic verse: "To you your faith and to us (Muslim) our faith".

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

"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.

As such, Dr Mahathir reminded the people that violence as a means of solving inter-religious disputes is "abhorred by all religious communities and political parties in this democratic nation".

Citing a case, Dr Mahathir said the relationship between Islam and Buddhism in the predominantly Muslim state of Kelantan had been most 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".

He said that looking beyond Malaysia's relatively peaceful history, it would appear that the prospect of a universal set of ethics binding races, cultures, religions and traditions, was encouraging and possible.

"Malaysians should therefore work towards it by example and by precept," he added. -- BERNAMA

ES JK