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PM: Strengthen resolve against unhealthy ways (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Instead of blaming external factors such as the advent of multimedia and the nightspots for the country's social ills, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the people should strengthen their personal resolve against unhealthy activities.

The Prime Minister said the people had to strengthen their personal discipline as this was the best defence they had against many destructive activities.

Dr Mahathir said: "This is the best defence which can save and protect us from being influenced by unhealthy activities. But before we are able to do this, we have to first understand the problems and the causes."

Dr Mahathir said these factors, together with the people's wealth and prosperity, should not be cited as the reasons for the ills plaguing society.

It was easier to correct oneself than to correct others, he said.

The Prime Minister said: "We have to ask ourselves frankly whether the social problems would go away, for example, by closing the nightspots. I do not think so... Patrons will perhaps find other means of entertainment."

He said the people should stop blaming these external factors. Instead, it was better for them to accept the existence of such problems and then search for ways to overcome them.

He was speaking at a special meeting with representatives of Federal and State religious agencies at Pusat Islam to discuss the social problems in the country.

Dr Mahathir drew the participants' attention to the belief in some quarters that the country's rapid economic progress, which provided the people with more opportunities and financial capabilities to indulge in negative activities, could be the reason behind the increasing social problems.

"But the question is why the problems are affecting the Muslims more than the non-Muslims whereas both sides are exposed to the same situation.

"Nightspots and entertainment centres are open to everyone, so why when it comes to social problems, the number of Muslims involved are more compared to the others?

"We have to accept that the Muslims are facing more social problems compared with non-Muslims. This has to be studied... we have to determine the actual reasons behind the moral decadence so that solutions can be found."

He said despite praises from other Islamic countries that regarded Malaysia as a model of a successful Islamic country, he said the fact could not be denied that problems existed in the society.

Later, speaking to reporters, the Prime Minister was also asked whether or not he feared certain Government decisions, including the directive to entertainment centres to close at 1am, could lead to youths going "underground".

He said: "Yes, there is that fear. But when some things are accepted as the norm, then we will have more and more people taking part in it.

"For example, in the West, for many years homosexuality has existed. When people started accepting homosexuality as a norm, those who are not homosexuals have become attracted to it and have accepted it.

"Similarly, when certain facilities are misused, then the unhealthy

influence will spread and will be accepted as the norm.

"We will not only require entertainment centres to close at lam but we will carry out enforcement to ensure that they abide by these rulings. This way, we hope to solve some of the problems."

Dr Mahathir said at present not many parents paid much attention to the upbringing of their children.

As Islam was capable of being used as a defence against unhealthy activities, more attention should be given to the content of religious studies taught in schools to develop the students' character.

Dr Mahathir said Islam was not only just related to obligations like praying daily, fasting or performing the haj.

"There are many other aspects of Islam like the need to work for a living. This is part of the religion. So we have to compete with others in our work or business activities or else Muslims will be left behind."

Dr Mahathir said times had changed and with the information age and borderless world, one could no longer isolate oneself.

"We cannot isolate ourselves just because we fear negative values from elsewhere may effect our society. There is not one Muslim country in the world which is free from the involvement of non-Muslims.

"Even in Mecca, the people there cannot stop information coming from non-Muslim countries."

Commenting on a statement by a religious official that the faith of Muslims could be affected if they were to regard the Chinese New Year and Hari Raya Puasa celebrations as having equal religious status, Dr Mahathir said:

"Muslims in the country should not turn the use of the words Kongs Raya into a problem."

He asked whether it would be a problem for the Muslims to celebrate together with Chinese New Year during the fasting month or be nice to non-Muslims.

"We pay them a visit on their New Year not because we want to eat but to show them that the Muslims are friendly... hopefully they will understand that Islam is a religion which respects the rights of others."

Dr Mahathir said Muslims must be able to show they were capable and could administer the nation in a just and fair manner.

He said Muslims were responsible for spreading the teachings of the religion, which he felt would not be achieved if these was done through isolation or by hurling abuses at others.

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