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Distorted by deliberate sensationalisation

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today reports by the Western media about Muslims were deliberately sensationalised and calculated to create the impression that Muslims were terrorists and fundamentalists.

"No attempt is made to explain that fundamentalists and extremists are found among all religious persuasions.

"The Hindus, the Sikhs, the Christians and even the Buddhists have produced their share of extremists and fundamentalists.

"Their deeds are every bit as cruel and irrational as the Muslim terrorists, indeed often more than them," he said when opening the Malaysia-European Union joint seminar.

Themed "Europe and the Islamic World", the two-day conference is being organised by the Malaysian Institute of Islamic Understanding (Ikim) and the European Union.

Dr Mahathir said the ethnic cleansing invented and practised by the Serbs had never been perpetrated by the Muslims.

Later, when answering questions from the floor, Dr Mahathir said the Western media was in the habit of immediately identifying Muslim terrorists by their religion.

"However, if the terrorists were Christians or Buddhists or of other religions, they choose not to mention it," he said.

On Turkey's application to join the EU which had not been accepted by the EU, Dr Mahathir said he was not sure whether it was due to religious or other grounds.

"But the fact remains that until now it has not been accepted into the EU.

"When I was in Hannover recently, a German official said the reason was because Turkey is in Asia and not in Europe."

Dr Mahathir said just as Europeans had the right to decide which countries were European and which were not, Asian countries would also like to decide which were the countries defined as Asian.

On the EU's role to resolve world conflicts, Dr Mahathir said efforts towards that end should be applauded.

However, he said, the EU would have to prove that it was independent of the United States in order to be seen as non-partisan.

Earlier, Michel Caillouet, ambassador and head of the EU delegation to the seminar, said the union had not closed its doors for further inclusion of other countries as members.

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