

25/03/1998

Western media partly to blame

THE Western media are partly responsible for the wrong perception of Islam and Muslims among the Europeans.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said most of the reports about Muslims have been sensationalised and calculated to create a bad impression of the Muslims who are always portrayed as terrorists, extremists and fundamentalists.

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

"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.

He was speaking at a dialogue after opening the Malaysia-European Union joint seminar at the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

He added that the ethnic cleansing, invented and practised by the Serbs, had never been perpetrated by the Muslims.

On Turkey's application to join the European Union, which had not been accepted, Dr Mahathir said he is 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 Hanover recently, a German official said the reason was because Turkey is in Asia and not in Europe," he said.

He said just as Europeans had the right to decide which country is European and which is not, Asian countries would also like to decide which countries can be defined as Asian.

Earlier, Mr Michel Caillouet, ambassador and head of the EU delegation to the seminar, said the union has not closed its door for further inclusion of other countries to its fold.

"I do not think the door is finally closed," Caillouet said when asked about Turkey's application to join the 15-member EU.

When asked if the EU should agree to carry out the agenda of other powers and its role to resolve world conflicts, Dr Mahathir said efforts by the EU towards that end should be applauded.

He said that the EU will have to prove that it is independent of the US in order to be seen as non-partisan.

"What we need is a degree of tolerance. If we live in a multi-racial world ... we need to be tolerant and considerate. We cannot impose our beliefs on others," Dr Mahathir said.

(END)