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Mahathir-Millennium

RELIGIONS HAVE A ROLE IN NEW MILLENNIUM, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 30 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said religions still have a role in the 21st century as without spiritual beliefs it is doubtful that man can overcome the challenges in the new millennium without becoming unbalanced.

"We are seeing now a swing towards total materialism in the West, where wealth alone is expected to bring about happiness and a better quality of life," he said when opening the "International Conference of Religious Studies: Meeting the Millennium" at the Palace of the Golden Horses Hotel here today.

The Prime Minister said the quest for unlimited wealth by the avaricious could destroy the tranquility of life and without a religious anchor man would have despaired.

"Calmed by our spiritual beliefs we were able to face the material problems of our life, to understand them and to overcome them." he said.

Believing that religions cannot be replaced by ideologies invented by man, Dr Mahathir said: "Religion according to Karl Marx is the opium of life. But religions have survived and will continue to survive long after Marx and his ideology are relegated to the history books."

Dr Mahathir also spoke of how Islam had been misunderstood by not only non-Muslims but also Muslims themselves.

Describing Islam as a religion of peace as the word Islam had its roots in the Arab word for peace, Dr Mahathir said the misunderstanding of Muslims about their religion has erected a tall barrier against access to it by non-Muslims.

Dr Mahathir said other manifestations of a lack of understanding of Islam among Muslims include the rejection of the Islamic concept and belief that all Muslims are brothers.

"Today with the emergence of political parties, the practising Muslim members of certain political parties are condemned as not being truly Muslim and are treated worse than non-Muslims by members of the opposing political parties," he said.

Dr Mahathir also spoke of the suppression of Muslims around the world and of how Western historians have twisted the facts about Islam and invariably attributed the spread of the religion to the sword, thus the labelling of Muslim terrorists has become common.

He said the Arabs had learned the methods of terrorism from the Europeans who were responsible for carrying out the first hijacking of a commercial plane and bombings in Northern Ireland.

"In the 60's and early 70's terrorist gangs abounded in Europe. The Baader-Meinhof gang was one of them," he said, adding that soon the Arabs followed the methods of such terrorists and were labelled Muslim terrorists.

"This labelling is a manifestation of the lack of understanding of Islam," he said.

He also said the fall of the Turkish empire was engineered by the Europeans who had stirred up nationalist sentiments among the Arab subjects of the Turks.

-- BERNAMA

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