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Replace customs which stifle progress, says PM

Sarban Singh; Hayati Hayatudin

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said ways and customs which stifled progress needed to be replaced with progressive values.

The Prime Minister said although Malaysians did not wish to see their civilisation, culture and heritage discarded, some aspects had stunted the country's development.

"We have to admit that there are some aspects which obstruct our development and weaken us.

"These aspects need to be identified and replaced with cultural values which could contribute to the development of our race and preserve our civilisation," he added.

Dr Mahathir said this when opening the RM210 million Istana Budaya tonight. Also present was Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir.

Istana Budaya is the first theatre in Asia with sophisticated stage mechanisms for theatre performances.

The state-of-the-art complex is placed in the same league as the Royal Albert Hall in London and the Opera House in Sydney. Its auditorium can accommodate 1,469 spectators.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia, which had a multi-racial society, had inherited three dominant and ancient cultures.

Despite this, there is no "clash of civilisations". Rather there is a tolerant society.

Dr Mahathir expressed hope that Malaysian writers and playwrights could inculcate constructive values in the minds of their audience.

"We are still in the midst of creating our own civilisation. Writers and playwrights can make their contributions via their shows and suggest the necessary changes."

He said writers and artistes could send the right message to the people and help instil constructive values which would help the people to progress.

"Our country is still new and loyalty to the nation does not come naturally. Those who are from here are sometimes not that willing to share their land with those whose forefathers had migrated here.

"On the other hand, the present generation of the migrants still feel for their culture and heritage which they inherited from their forefathers.

"So, can we instil undivided love for the country and contain, if not, forget, our roots?"

Dr Mahathir said writers and playwrights should "steer" the multi-racial society to declare their undivided loyalty to the nation and stop being envious of each other's rights.

He urged the people to create a culture which was almost identical, so that the differences between the various races, would not keep them apart.

"This is a big challenge for our writers and playwrights."

He said although Istana Budaya was built by the Government, it was not owned by it.

"It is owned by those who are going to use it to stage interpretations and translations of culture ... a culture which is part of our young and delicate civilisation."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians should not ape Western values, which had decayed, where free sex had taken precedence over family institution and

marriage between the same sex had become a norm.

"To them, mankind should not follow the conventional way. Instead, individuals should do what they want to do.

"They can decide on their clothing, behaviour, morals, language and if they feel like indulging in sex, they can just do it."

Dr Mahathir said this would only lead to the demise of civilisation, adding that there were many ancient civilisations which had been destroyed this way.

He said if ancient civilisations could disintegrate, all the more could a new and delicate one.

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