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Dr M: Malaysians should reflect on challenges of the new millennium

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - While Hari Raya Aidilfitri can be celebrated joyously, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight Malaysians should reflect on the challenges of the new millennium.

These include Western-propagated ideals and attempts to corrupt the culture and values of the people.

In his Aidilfitri message aired over Radio Television Malaysia, the Prime Minister said whether the effects of the ideals were detrimental depended on the ability of Malaysians to understand and deal with things thrown in their paths.

"Although we have the right to celebrate, we should not be over-exuberant. Our happiness should be moderate, it is a happiness at having been able to complete our religious obligations in the fasting month," he said.

The happiness should cultivate repentance and responsibility towards the society. He warned if it was not on guard, the new millennium could spell great disaster to the country.

Hari Raya this year, said Dr Mahathir, was more meaningful as the country's economy had recovered and the dangers posed by foreign speculators had been curtailed.

The people no longer felt the pressure of not being able to buy imported items; civil servants were enjoying a better time with bonus payments and salary increases; and businesses, either big or small, had posted profits while shopping complexes were filled with shoppers.

He expressed concern with the serious implications to the country if the people were not grateful and were taught not to be thankful for what they had received.

"There are parties who, purposely and for specific interests, are spreading beliefs contrary to Islamic teachings. We know that we should be thankful for things we enjoyed and we should be grateful not only to God but also to those who made this possible.

"But now the people are being taught to be grateful only to God and not to those who provided the blessings because ostensibly, they are entitled to these which would have been given by others anyway."

The Prime Minister said the change in the meaning of gratitude would have serious implications.

"If we are not appreciative and grateful to those who give us something, then surely no one will want to give us anything."

Saying that today the Muslims in Malaysia were disunited and weak, Dr Mahathir warned that if they were not grateful to their benefactors, there would be no mutual help among the community.

"Each one will tend to mind his own business even during emergencies. Then, surely our Muslim community will disintegrate because each one will save his own skin although the attack is on the whole community."

Touching on the spreading of ideals, ideologies and values like globalisation, democracy and absolute freedom, Dr Mahathir felt the dangers were real because of the control by the West over the print and electronic media.

"Faced with an onslaught from this machinery, and if we are weak, we will not be able to defend and protect our culture and values. If our resilience is defeated and we begin to embrace part or the whole of their culture and lifestyle, this means that part of our freedom has been

eroded."

Touching on the concept of freedom advocated by the West, the Prime Minister said from something related to gaining independence, it had now been expanded to stress all aspects of life.

"It now concerns lifting whatever barriers or restrictions are imposed. People must be allowed to do anything that they like according to their heart and desire."

The same brand of freedom was being advocated regarding temptations, he said, citing as an example the opinion of a market speculator Ivan Boesky, who advocated that "greed is great".

"We know greedy people are heinous people as they do not have any regard for the effects of their action on others.

"If everyone in a society is greedy, surely it would be a troubled society as everyone would grab things for their own. With this, disturbances and riots would occur all the time ... there would not be peace and safety," he said, adding that the attacks by currency speculators on East Asia was an example of people's greed.

Dr Mahathir said there were many other examples of excessiveness brought about by the advocacy of absolute freedom.

"In the West, you can go naked if this is what you want. Therefore, many have gone naked as proof of their rights and freedom."

He said the family and marriage institutions were also regarded as restricting the freedom of temptations and desires, thus living out of wedlock was accepted as a norm in the West.

"But living together with a certain partner does not reflect complete freedom, so one is free to choose with whom they want to spend the night with. Those who subscribe to freedom must not be jealous or angry as commitment to this must be total."

Dr Mahathir said one would say that the Islamic society in Malaysia would not accept excessiveness like homosexuality but he cautioned that some might be influenced owing to propoganda by the West.

While Malaysians celebrated Aidilfitri in peace and safety, Dr Mahathir added that they should not forget the sacrifices of the army, police, Fire and Rescue Department and other related agencies which had made this possible.

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