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Mahathir-History

LEARN FROM HISTORY TO AVOID REPEATING MISTAKES, SAYS PM

KOTA KINABALU, July 27 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said it is important to learn from history so as not to repeat the same mistakes committed in the past.

He said history was not just for school children to memorise dates and events for tests but also for adults especially those entrusted with determining national policies.

"If they could continuously study history and seek the lessons that history provides, then they would be less prone to repeat mistakes of the past," he said when opening the 16th Conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia here today.

Dr Mahathir said the world and its community of nations would be better governed if lessons of history are learnt.

He urged historians and scholars to be true to themselves and to the facts in history.

" You, more than anyone else, must point out and explain the lessons of history," said Dr Mahathir.

In the case of Malaysia, the prime minister said it has been often emphasised by the British colonialists that Malaya was a country without history.

But, he said, the people of this country remembered enough of their past and fought to defend their homeland.

Contrary to most countries, which glorified their struggles to imbue the sense of patriotism, Malaysians were shy to even recognise the real sacrifices and contribution of the nation's founders, said Dr Mahathir.

The country's historical achievement, including the recent one, was the handling of race relations to prevent racist sentiments from developing and disrupting peace and harmony in the country's multi-racial society, he said.

" After the 1969 race riots, the National Front Government took pains to remove the roots of such antagonism and jealousy between the races," said Dr Mahathir.

Dr Mahathir said through political and economic actions undertaken by the government, the differences and disparities between races had been reduced.

" As a result Malaysia is one multi-racial country which is free from the kind of race and religious frictions and confrontations which characterise other multi-racial or multi-religious countries," he said.

Nonetheless, there remained certain quarters who were unhappy with the prevalent peace and harmonious racial relations, he said.

"The government has been accused of being unIslamic by a certain political party in order to cause Muslims to hate the government and its dedication to tolerance and fairness to all races and religions," said the prime minister.

These quarters propagated religious extremism contrary to the teachings of Islam thus leading to an attempt to overthrow the government by force, said Dr Mahathir.

Dr Mahathir said hatred was still being sowed by those bent on winning support for their parties at all costs and these experiences were part of Malaysian recent history which the people should know and learn about.

There had also been attempts by foreigners through their controlled-media to abet inter-racial and inter-religious violence in Malaysia, he said.

"They advocate democracy as an end in itself. If the democracy leads to violence and destruction of an otherwise stable and prosperous society, it does not matter," said Dr Mahathir.

He said history had proven that various forms and concepts of government -- feudalism, republicanism, socialism, communism and dictatorships -- espoused as solutions to the problems in a government, have also been found to be oppressive and had to be discarded.

The same thing was happening today with democracy, said Dr Mahathir.

" It is not the good results which democracy is supposed to bring about that is important. It is democracy and everything done in the name of democracy that is important," he said.

As a result, countries were becoming anarchic and unable to develop because democracy in many instances undermined the ability of a government to maintain law and order as well as to develop, he said.

Yet the world accepted democracy as the sole system of governance and suffered all kinds of hardships caused by it, said the prime minister.

" Isn't it likely that as with the other systems, democracy too will one day be recognised for the hardships and anarchy that it had caused; that it would be discredited and would eventually be rejected?" asked Dr Mahathir.

" If democracy becomes extreme and oppressive because of the abuses in the name of democracy, then we have learnt nothing from our past either, for we have become so enamoured with democracy that we are unwilling to recognise and stop the abuses which are destroying the original ideals which had made us espouse the system," said Dr Mahathir.

About 200 scholars and historians are attending in the five-day conference.

-- BERNAMA

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