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PM: Know our history (HL)

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KOTA KINABALU, Thurs. - To be patriotic, Malaysians must know their history especially about the struggles and sacrifices of their nation's founders in wielding together a multiracial society, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Speaking at the opening of the 16th Conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia, he said most countries glorify their struggles in order to imbue a sense of patriotism among their peoples.

"But in Malaysia we feel rather shy about glorifying our past, even recognising the real sacrifices and contributions of our founders," he told historians from 30 countries at the Magellan Sutura Hotel.

Dr Mahathir said British colonialists and their historians had insisted that this country had no history but the Malays remembered enough of their past to rise against the formation of the Malayan Union in 1946.

But the story of the struggle to regain their own land, the story of Datuk Onn, Datuk Panglima Bukit Gantang, Datuk Nik Kamil and others, are strangely, not well told to Malaysian students today.

"It is as if the Government of independent Malaysia also wishes to propagate the view that Malaysia is a country without history," he told delegates to the conference themed 'One Hundred Years of Asian History: The Twentieth Century in Historical Perspective'.

The Prime Minister said a historical achievement of Malaysia - a Malaysian story and part of Malaysia's recent history - is the handling of race relations in order to prevent racist sentiments from developing and disturbing the peace and harmony after the 1969 race riots.

He said it was something that the peoples of Malaysia should learn about but the fear that such a story might favour the current BN Government had resulted in these achievements not being played up as part of Malaysia's historical heritage.

"A good thing is feared because it may continue to do good," he said and added that "and so another lesson of history may be lost".

He said it was a lesson that could teach Malaysians about the conduct of government, the behaviour of politicians, and the discipline required in a democracy in order to prevent a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural country from going up in flames and destroying itself.

History is not just for schoolchildren but also for adults, particularly those who are entrusted with determining the policies of a nation.

Dr Mahathir talked about the United Nations, an international organisation dedicated to peace and equality among nations, as being dominated by the big powers and where inequality is enshrined in its charter.

He said the end of the Cold War has resulted in the world being dominated by one Western bloc which is seeking to impose its will on the rest of the world both economically and ideologically.

Dr Mahathir said the history of the world is therefore the story of perpetual conquest and subjugation of the weak by the strong because humankind ignores the lessons of the past.

"And so we see the return of imperialism in a different form," he said.

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