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Malaysians should learn more about Islam in China, says Dr M

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Malaysians, particularly Muslim Malays, should learn more about Islam in China as the religion had been accepted and widely practised in the country before it arrived here.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Malays should also "open their eyes" and carefully study the basis of Prophet Muhammad's advice when he said: "Seek knowledge, even if you have to go to China".

"I'm quite sure that if the Muslims had made an injunction of what the Prophet had said (about China), they would be much better off than at present," Dr Mahathir said, adding that even during the Prophet's time, China had advanced tremendously.

Speaking at the officiating ceremony of the "Six Centuries of Islamic Art in China" exhibition at the Islamic Arts museum here, the Prime Minister cited China's quest for knowledge and skills as its prime value which should be emulated by all.

He said that the Chinese had acquired the skills to make paper and explosives long before other races on the globe.

"The Chinese then had the skills to make explosives, not to destroy anything but to chase and scare away demons and devils... this was later adopted by the Europeans and utilised in various things, including launching rockets into the sky," he explained.

He said that a closer look at the various forms of art from China revealed a peculiar mix of Chinese and Islamic culture which demonstrated the tremendous development of art in China.

The Prime Minister said that not many Muslims were aware of the deep-rooted practice and development of Islam in China which had continued to flourish thousands of years ago.

While congratulating the organisers for successfully exhibiting Islamic art from China (which is a combination of art, culture and tradition), Dr Mahathir said he hoped such initiatives would help cement closer overall relationship between Malaysia and China.

"I also hope that we all can learn from our understanding of Islam in China," he said.

The exhibition, held after a meticulous three year planning, is organised by the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia with the Museum of Cultural Palace of Nationalities (Beijing) and the North West Minorities University (Lanzhou).

The exhibition, which will be held until Oct 28, features cultural artefacts of the Chinese Muslims from the 14th to the 20th century.

It also aims to provide an insight into the coming of Islam to China, the comparative influences between the Islamic and Chinese world and the rich cultural diversity in China where there are 10 Chinese Muslim ethnic groups.

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