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Reject minority groups which are not tolerant, urges PM

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has urged Malaysians to reject minority groups which are not tolerant and resort to violence to seize power for their own gain and interest.

He said it was the hope of the majority that Malaysians will continue to hold on to their tolerance and reject all forms of political extremism.

"They must be stopped although they may later claim that we are not being tolerant towards them. Tolerance is only for those who are tolerant.

"Malaysia is a a very peaceful and developed country and it is only those who are ignorant deny the fact," he said in his keynote address at the Seminar on Racial Tolerance at the Institute of Islamic Understanding (Ikim) office at Jalan Langgak Tunku here today.

Dr Mahathir said the success for the country's progress was owing to the realisation of the majority of the people of diverse races and religions that only by being tolerant could they enjoy peace and progress.

"Whatever the reason, people of different races and religions are tolerant of each other and live peacefully together.

"Is this because the Malays, unlike the other races in the world, are truly tolerant of the others?"

Citing an example, Dr Mahathir said during the Malacca Sultanate, Malays were so tolerant of foreign traders from Arabia, China and India that they allowed the foreigners to later become permanent residents.

"They did not make enemies with these people and instead were even willing to move out of places developed by the aggressive immigrants.

"The Malays were tolerant because they wanted an easy life. If the immigrants were willing to work for them, the Malays were then willing to accept and also to accommodate them.

"They were not concerned with the fact that they were becoming poor compared with the immigrants who were getting richer."

Dr Mahathir said the attitude of the Malays was different from the other races who were not willing to tolerate although their importance and interest were not affected.

He said even among the Muslims, being intolerant was evident as there were among them those who had deviated from the original teachings of Islam.

"Although Islam accepts differences in one's intepretation of its teachings, there are certain quarters who are not willing to see other Muslims having even a minor difference of views."

He said in the centuries and the decades to come, there would no longer be any country populated by a single ethnic group or race.

He said the high human mobility at present and communication facilities like shipping and airlines had made it increasingly difficult to control a country's border.

It had also made travelling for those migrating from one place to another easier. This, Dr Mahathir said, would result in all countries having multi-ethnic citizens orginating from different places.

"This development would make it difficult to preserve the indigenous people's identity through culture, religion and language. The immigrants would surely be keen to continue retaining their language, culture and religion."

Dr Mahathir said there would be a time when a person's race could only be determined by looking at their identification documents.

"The attempts to accept immigrants as citizens only after they assimilate the indigenous language, culture and religion will decrease. Thus, the citizens of a country would comprise various races with different backgrounds."

Dr Mahathir said the migration of the poor to the rich countries had made racial problems more pronounced as there was bound to be immigrants who worked hard and become richer.

"When the number of immigrant population increases, they will then pose a threat to the locals and cause racial tension which would affect the racial tolerance.

"With an increasing number of immigrants, race relations will deteriorate and it would become difficult for each race, especially the locals, to be tolerant."

Arrogance of a race and their insecurity, he added, would be among the factors that would lead to intolerance of immigrants.

"The tolerance level is closely related to interest of the self and race. It is easy to show tolerance if the problem is in other people's country but when one's own country is threatened, then tolerance is cast aside."

Dr Mahathir cited as an example the recent serious racial clashes in Britain when at the same time, the British were so fond of criticising Malaysia and accusing the Malays of being intolerant and unfair to the Chinese community.

"It is easy actually to be tolerant of the immigrants in other countries but not so when one is being threatened by the immigrants."