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`Make travel a way of life'

Firdaus Abdullah

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Tourism can help foster good relationship between Islamic countries and their people because by travelling, Muslims can learn to understand and appreciate each other better.

In urging Muslims to make travelling a way of life, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today inter-Muslim nation tourism should be enhanced as it was a multi-pronged approach towards greater unity and understanding.

"There is a real need for us to see and understand how other people live. For Muslims, getting to know other Muslims in other countries is almost a duty.

"We must admit that despite our religion enjoining us to be brothers, we're really not very close to one another," Dr Mahathir said in his opening address at the 2nd Organisation of Islamic Conference's Tourism Ministers meeting here today.

He told those present that while a thousand years ago Muslims were prepared to endure extreme hardship and danger to brave the oceans, now, with all the easy transportation they should travel more.

Dr Mahathir said that apart from its contribution to the economy, tourism also helped to reveal business opportunities and improve general knowledge.

Calling for greater travel between West Asia, North Africa and Southeast Asia, Dr Mahathir said that such contacts would help reinforce old relations and nurture greater trade between the regions.

"As Muslims we can develop brotherly relations, enhance our knowledge of Islam and achieve greater solidarity. Together we can recapture at least a part of the glory of the golden years of Islam," he said.

Describing the present world scenario as tumultuous, he said that the overwhelming wave of change that was taking place could be a double-sided sword if not handled carefully.

He explained that merely reacting to schemes and ideas devised by others could be detrimental as such ideas, like globalisation, were formulated for the benefit of the mighty.

"Alone we are bound to go under, but together we may stand a chance," he told the meeting, adding that to be united, Muslim nations must first strive to understand each other better in every aspect.

Telling those present that knowledge determined who progressed and who did not, he urged Muslims to enhance their bond and seek knowledge as done by the early day travellers who sailed thousands of miles for experience and knowledge. "We have a hundred times more opportunities and capacity to contribute to the Islamic Renaissance than these great people of the past. It would be wrong not to seize the opportunities coming our way," Dr Mahathir said.

Also present at the opening were Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Kadir Sheikh Fadzir and World Tourism Organisation secretary general Francesco Frangialli.