

Don't import other cultures, says Dr M

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MBABANE (Swaziland): The Prime Minister has advised communities against the wholesale import of other cultures to the extent of marginalising their own traditional values.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told members of Club 29 - comprising young entrepreneurs and professionals - that it was necessary to be judicious in what "one wants or thinks is good."

He cited the phenomenon of young Asian people adopted the "Afro hairstyle" by simply aping the West.

Those in the West, he said, had adopted the hairstyle because they felt guilty of their past exploitation of African people and hoped to use it to atone for the wrongs they had committed. But Asians had no need to do so as "we have done nothing against the blacks," he said on Friday.

Dr Mahathir was responding to a Swazi member who wanted to know his views on how to balance culture with traditional values during a "smart interaction" between the club members and heads of states during the Global 2003 Smart Partnership International Dialogue in the Ezulwini Valley near here.

Dr Mahathir, however, also cautioned against accepting practices which over time could become the cultural norms of a community.

In this context, he cited the condoning of same-sex marriages and the recent case of a Christian congregation accepting a gay bishop, noting that they were morally wrong.

At a dinner later, Dr Mahathir praised Swazis for the pristine air in their country, adding that development should not be at the expense of the environment.

He noted that while Malaysia had

achieved much in the course of its development, it had paid a heavy cost in terms of pollution, having to choose between prioritising the environment or the local car industry.

"There are now too many cars spewing out carbon monoxide and causing us to inhale poisons into our lungs," he said.

At the same event, Mozambique President Joachim Chissano paid tribute to Dr Mahathir as a "great man" for his involvement in the smart partnership movement and who had successfully implemented change and brought about progress in his own way.

Dr Mahathir also launched the book, *Malaysia-Africa Relations, Searching for Common Goals*, written by Universiti Malaya lecturer Dr Hamidin Abdul Hamid.

He left Swaziland yesterday for a state visit to Syria, which begins today.