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Mahathir-Club

BE JUDICIOUS IN CHOOSING CULTURE AND TRADITION, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: Mikhail Raj Abdullah

EZULWINI (Swaziland), Aug 16 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called on communities now bombarded with all sorts of culture and tradition to be judicious and adopt what is good and progressive for society and discard the negative.

"We must be able to evaluate cultures and traditions in order to know whether we should continue with it or not," he said in response to questions put forward by members of the Club of 29 comprising young professionals and entrepreneurs at the Global 2003 Smart Partnership International Dialogue Friday.

"Our priority of course is to progress and to progress. We have to do certain things which is not found in our own traditions and cultures," he said when asked how one reconciles with the need to embrace modernity to progress while at the same time keeping tradition to ensure one's identity.

He said: "We cannot say to ourselves that even though we can progress, our cultures say we should not do this thing, therefore we will forego progress that I think will be a very negative thing."

On the other hand, "people should admit that there were things that have been done in the past which we have inherited (and) which will not help but in fact it will be an obstacle to your progress," Dr Mahathir said.

He said that anything that "we do today and if we continue to do it for decades, then afterwards it becomes tradition."

And as far as culture was concerned, he said, it was something that was inherited that gives an identity to people and people do not want to lose that identity.

He cited how in traditions in most Asian societies, the wife must submit to the husband.

"But if you have a husband who is suffering from HIV-AIDS, that obviously is going to cause the wife as well as the children to get AIDS," he said.

At that stage, faced with such a dilemma, do you stick to culture or do you say "let's forget about culture, forget about submission (and that) this is wrong."

"That we have to change and have a new evaluation and approach to this culture," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that was a very glaring example, but there were many other things that needed to be discarded and new practices taken on which over time can become tradition and culture.

"You have to be judicious, you have to learn to evaluate what you inherit, you have also to decide for yourselves whether this will be good for you or not," the Prime Minister said.

"You may say that this is good for you, but 10 years down the line, they will find that what they have decided is an obstruction or an obstacle to them.

"They will have to discard and start a new thing which eventually will become part of that culture and tradition of that particular society," he said.

Nevertheless, Dr Mahathir said that "what I will not approve is wholesale import of other people's cultures and adopting it without thinking."

For instance, he said that at one time, the Afro hairstyle was very

popular because the whites in America felt guilty about the way they treated the blacks and so they wanted to identify themselves with the blacks.

"But they couldn't paint themselves black. So what they did was to grow this Afro hairdo and we in Asia followed that, although we in Asia never did anything to the blacks and were not guilty of anything," he said.

When evaluating culture that might come from elsewhere, "we have to think about why they adopted that culture and why we should or should not adopt that culture."

The Prime Minister said society was under continuous assault now through the media, television, video and Internet and assailed with all sorts of culture and it has to consider whether they were suitable.

"I don't think many of us are going to approve marriages between the same sex or something along that line. I'm sorry (that although) I'am not a Christian, I must say I'm shocked when a Christian priest who admits to be gay is accepted by the congregation.

"I hope I'm not hurting anybody's feelings, but it is wrong. This is what we have been preaching against and the preachers suddenly say that what we've been preaching in the past was all wrong and that it is all right now," Dr Mahathir said.

"So you have to be judicious in the choice of some tradition and culture that you should adopt and you should not feel hurt if later they discard what we have chosen and start on something else," the Prime Minister said.

-- BERNAMA

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