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PM: Nurture culture of peace (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said the world, especially powerful nations, should deliberately nurture a culture of peace to sustain world order.

"For the countries and the people of the world, valuing peace must be cultivated deliberately, must be made a part of the national cultures beginning in the schools and throughout life.

"This culture must be adopted fully and seriously, especially by the powerful countries of the world, by their people."

Dr Mahathir said a culture of peace was particularly important among those who were arming themselves to the teeth, constantly developing arms and who sold them to confronting pairs of countries.

"Unless the powerful reject war as an instrument of national policy, peace would be impossible," Dr Mahathir said in his keynote address when opening the two-day Kuala Lumpur World Peace Conference at the Mandarin Oriental Kuala Lumpur today.

"But is peace for the world, for the countries and the peoples of the world possible? Of course, it is," Dr Mahathir said, adding that it would be a sad commentary on the 21st century civilisation if it accepted that peace was impossible.

"It is even sadder when 21st century civilisation accepts that the weak must continue to be bullied and hegemonised by the strong."

"Peace is possible if we make exceptions for no one in terms of submission to the only international authority that we have, the United Nations.

"It is presently not a democratic organisation, prevented from being so by the very people who preach democracy," he said, adding that it was still the only international authority that we had.

"We have to make it work. And it can work if the powerful countries restore its credibility by respecting it and the decisions made by it."

He also said peace could be had if the selfish exploitation of the world by the "avaricious and the greedy" was curbed.

"The market, or rather the very rich business and money manipulators, are elected by no one. They may be rich and powerful but they represent no one but themselves. If we allow these greedy people to rule the world, we might as well forget about democracy."

He said that their selfish exploitation of the world had impoverished countries and people so much that a backlash by the very poor was inevitable.

"Unfortunately, instead of dealing with this social ill, the powerful can only see democratisation and the free market as the solution. Yet these very solutions are the causes of the extreme disparities which make peace impossible," Dr Mahathir said.

He said if the democrats were truly democratic, they could do so much to curb aggression, to be sensitive to the problems of the poor majority and to help remove the extreme disparities between the rich and the poor which were the causes of unrest, violence and terrorism and absence of peace. He added that in a globalised world, the rich countries and the rich people must be taxed in order to alleviate the poverty of poor countries and its people.

Dr Mahathir said the disparities in the world today were once reflected in Malaysia where tension caused by this situation led to racial

riots, destruction of property and deaths in 1969.

To avoid a recurrence, the Government launched an affirmative action plan to reduce disparities between races and eradicate poverty among all, he said.

"And so when the economic crisis of 1997-1998 brought great hardship to the people, there were no race riots as in other affected countries."

On the inaugural Kuala Lumpur World Peace Award which was presented to French President Jacques Chirac recently, Dr Mahathir said it was right for Malaysia, as a peaceful Muslim country, to campaign for peace and create a world peace award for the most deserving person of our times.

The award was initiated by the Malaysian World Peace Foundation in recognition of Chirac's outstanding dedication to the peaceful resolution of international conflict, courage in the defence of principle and commitment to co-operation among the nations of the world.

Dr Mahathir said the two-day peace conference was timely, bringing together several of the world's prominent statesmen and thinkers to share their views on peace and lend their support to Malaysia's endeavour.

He suggested that the world should take note of Malaysia as a relevant example of how the differences among people could be settled without violence but through negotiations rather than confrontations and war.

Dr Mahathir later toured a war and peace exhibition by students of Limkokwing Institute of Creative Technology. Also present was conference organising chairman Tan Sri Lim Kok Wing.