

PM: Good governance is natural to Muslim nations

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Najib Abdul Razak said good governance should come naturally for Muslim nations as it has been in their nature for more than 1,500 years.

Quoting history, the prime minister said, the fourth caliph and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad, Ali bin Abi Talib once told then governor of Egypt Maalik as-Ashtar that his administration would only succeed if he governed with concern for justice, equity, probity and prosperity for all, including women.

"So as Muslim nations, we have long known that such attitudes are not merely the preserve of Western liberal democracies," he said in his special address at the opening of the seventh World Islamic Economic Forum (WIEF) in Astana today.

Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev (right in photo) officiated at the ceremony, which was attended by several heads of government and some 2,000 participants from 50 countries including about 250 from Malaysia.

Najib said governing, as Ali ordered, with justice, equity and probity was not about falling in line with Western attitudes, but acting in line with Quranic teachings.

"But that does not mean that applying Ali's thoughts to the modern world would not be challenging.

"In a world characterised by unbridled political influence, unequal competition and opportunities, strong family ties, unlimited greed, inadequate rules and regulations and poor enforcement, good governance is easier said than done," he said.

He added that even the fear of God at times could do little to ensure adherence to the principles of integrity.

As political leaders and statesmen, he said, it was up to them to show the resolve, dedication, commitment and political will required to do what was right and right what was wrong and to prevent corruption, secrecy and backroom deals from becoming the norm in societies.

Government welcomes diverse views

"If governments are to endure and flourish and the interests and expectations of their people, especially the young, are to be met, it is vital that we develop new approaches and new economic models that are appropriate to our respective internal dynamics," he said.

Najib believes that the Malaysian government has helped to lead the way, embarking on a series of readjustment and transformation initiatives to emphasise the positive influence of good governance on the competitiveness of the country.

"Numerous initiatives and measures to instil and inculcate good values and ethical conduct, integrity and efforts to combat corruption in all sectors of society have been introduced," he said.

He named as examples the Whistleblower Protection Act, National Integrity Plan, introduction of the Key Performance Indicators and a reformed anti-corruption agency (now Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission) and Human Rights Commission which were already making a real difference in everyday life.

He said that in order to provide a healthy mechanism of checks and balances, the government also welcomed comments and views from within its own institutions as well as from religious organisations,

minority groups, the media and business.

He also shared with the leaders and participants at the Great Hall in the Palace of Independence that all those were being pursued in the context of the country's 1Malaysia motto of 'People First, Performance Now'.

The prime minister said thanks to strategies such as the Government Transformation Programme, New Economic Model and Economic Transformation Programme that Malaysia now had a clear roadmap that would help it achieve its vision of turning the country into a high-income country in a fair and just way that would benefit everyone in society.

Mainstream value

"We are aware that we may have a long journey ahead, and that the road may be full of obstacles. But our commitment and determination to strive and succeed will never fade," he said, adding that the responsibility of applying those principles could not lie simply with the government but must involve the nation as a whole.

On the WIEF, he said: "The conference is the ideal forum to create the necessary awareness, share experience and develop new and innovative ideas on how best the principles of good governance can be widely disseminated, so as to be appreciated and put into practice by leaders, businessess and the people as a whole."

He said the promotion of those principles must become an ongoing process, "a journey that does not end until good governance truly becomes the mainstream value of all Muslim nations, and only then it could be ensured that economies could continue to grow, Muslims continue to thrive and societies to become more equitable".

On inequity, Najib said the global economy was expected to grow at 3.3 per cent this year and 3.6 per cent in 2012, according to the World Bank projections, but the distribution of global wealth was inequitable with the average GDP growth for Muslim countries as a whole at only 2.1 per cent in 2009.

He said it was a relatively low growth rate that was further compounded by unequal development and inequitable distribution of wealth and income within the Muslim countries themselves.

Quoting data, Najib said it was a salutary note that in terms of ease of doing business and business regulations, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Bahrain and the UAE were the only OIC countries in the top 40 out of 183 economies, while Kazakhstan was the country that had done most to improve business regulations last year.

- Bernama