

Apec leaders condemn terrorism

Nst 2 2 OCT 2001

APEC leaders were one in condemning terrorism and acts of terror, but agreed that each will act in their own way and there is no compulsion on the types of action that they must take.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said as a result, it was not necessary to talk about Afghanistan.

He explained that Malaysia's stand not to support the US-led military action in Afghanistan had not in anyway been an obstruction to reaching an agreement.

Malaysia is against terrorism, but does not support military action and instead seeks to deal with the root causes of terrorism, in whatever form.

That was why, the Prime Minister said, he had spoken of the need to define who is a terrorist as one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.

Elaborating, he said, many in the past had been described as terrorists and later became respectable leaders in their own countries, including Jomo Kenyatta and Robert Mugabe.

Then again there was a peculiar situation with regard to the Irish Republican Army which is regarded as a terrorist organisation by Britain, but not so in the United States where it can raise funds.

There is also a need to know what exactly is an act of terror.

Crashing an aircraft into a building which has so many innocent people working inside, that would be an act of terror no matter what the cause may be.

There is no justification for that. Tying a bomb to your body and exploding it in a supermarket would not be acceptable even if they are fighting for their own liberties.

While many agreed on the need

to identify the terrorists, there was no consensus for an international conference.

Said Dr Mahathir: "We would be much more comfortable with the UN calling the shots. If it is a country, no matter how powerful and influential it is, some people may not agree.

"But if the agreement is reached in the UN and the world body takes the initiative, people are more likely to submit to such a policy direction."

Citing an example, he said money laundering and the need to track down the money that belongs to the Osama group is a UN resolution and as such, all countries are complying with it.

Asked on what role Malaysia, as a moderate Muslim country, would take in the fight against terrorism, Dr Mahathir said:

"We would like to stop, in whatever way we can, all acts of terror, by Muslims or non-Muslims alike.

"We object to the use of so-called smart bombs and smart rockets and have found them to be not so smart after all. For example, there is the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia.

"Today, we hear that special ground forces have moved into the ground. They are specific and not going to attack children or pregnant women.

"They will go after those defined as terrorists. That is an improvement. We are not willing to support military action. But such limited military action may be necessary to crack down on the terrorists."

He told a Press conference at the end of the leaders' meeting at the International Media Centre that some leaders agreed to identify the causes of terrorism and deal with them.

"During the cause of our discus-

sion, people were very conscious of the need not just to have a military offensive, but also diplomatic offensive.

"We try to resolve some of the problems in the Middle East in particular, which many feel is related to the terrorism that we are seeing today," he added.

On the US-led offensive, Dr Mahathir said: "It is not a war against Islam and not a war between the US and Muslims either.

"If it were a war against Islam, it would be easy to wipe out 300 million Muslims by dropping nuclear weapons on them. This is not their intention.

"As you can see, they have targeted places where the terrorists are. We are quite satisfied that it is not war against Islam and we will co-operate to hunt down the terrorists even if we may not agree with certain measures that have been taken.

"Terrorists do not spare any country and we have a need to support any action against terrorists. The support is not conditional and the support is about getting rid of the terrorists and their terror acts."

Asked about the extremists in Malaysia who had been trained by the Taliban, Dr Mahathir said:

"We are worried about extremists in our country. Nobody likes to have extremists in his or her country." On the call by Pas for extremists to volunteer to fight in Afghanistan, the Prime Minister said:

"As for the call for volunteers, they can if they want to but I doubt they will be effective.

"Since the leaders called on them to volunteer, perhaps the leaders themselves should volunteer first."

— From Hardev Kaur and Rupa Damodaran