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A dastardly act

THE horrendous terrorist attacks against the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington which killed and wounded thousands of innocent people are despicable acts. It is a nightmare for the American people and the US Government to have to face such a terrible tragedy and we are all shocked by the senseless loss of lives.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed, along with other world leaders, has expressed his sadness over the attacks. At the same time he is also worried the Americans will retaliate and this in turn could claim more lives.

It is understandable that the Americans will want to act against those responsible. However, President George W. Bush's statement that the US would make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbour them is ominous. This can mean tit-for-tat on a wider scope. One hopes when the dust settles a calmer judgment will prevail and the American response will be even-handed. Violence begets violence and retaliation will result in more deaths, invariably innocent people who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The road ahead will be fraught with dangers.

There is little defence against suicide attacks. Even the US, with its sophisticated technology and extensive intelligence services, is not safe from those who are willing to sacrifice their lives and those of innocent people in achieving their aims. Any successful fight against international terrorism will have to depend on close co-operation among the governments of the world and for them to take a firm stand against terrorism and militancy. Japan's kamikaze pilots of World War II showed the world what havoc men who are prepared to die for a cause could wreak. This form of terror is perpetuated in Sri Lanka and lately in the Middle East. In the present incident, it is the scale and intensity that shocked. A low-tech attack with devastating consequences.

The co-ordinated attack on America's military headquarters and the country's financial hub go beyond symbolism. It is obvious that the perpetrators believed they were the victims of US policies and actions and they were settling a blood debt. Whatever their reasons, neither the Malaysian Government nor the people can remain ambivalent or condone such acts. We condemn terrorism in all its forms.

Given the position of the US as the world's leading economic and financial powerhouse, the incident has repercussions far beyond American soil. One collateral damage is the US economy which was teetering on the brink of recession even before this happened. Now, some analysts say a recession is definitely on the cards. This in turn will have an adverse effect on other countries, including Malaysia. The New York Stock Exchange has been closed for trading and financial markets have been hit. The Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange is also closed. Billions of ringgit have been wiped off from the European, Tokyo, Hong Kong and other stock markets which stayed open.

All of us who love peace, share a common revulsion against terrorism. But we must realise that terrorism cannot exist in a vacuum. It arises from a cesspool of hatred and enmity among people who are desperate and believe their struggle to be just. A more peaceful and secure world can only be established through a spirit of accommodation, reconciliation and goodwill.

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