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Dr M: Act of terror does not reflect jihad

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Malaysia does not support the holy war or jihad propagated by Osama bin Laden as it did not represent the true cause of Islam, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said if a particular group of people had to fight their enemies, they should not kill people who had nothing to do with the oppression they were subjected to.

"What had been done was the killing of more than 6,000 people who had nothing to do with oppression," he said in an interview aired over TV1 tonight.

"They included Malaysians. What wrong did we do that Malaysians should be killed? That was an act of terror and it did not reflect true jihad."

The interview was moderated by National Economic Action Council communication team head Abdul Rahman Sulaiman, with Utusan Malaysia senior news editor Abdul Aziz Ishak and The Star senior news editor Wong Chun Wai as panellists.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on Osama's call for jihad against the US following the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on Sept 11.

"If it were jihad there was no need to kill and then embark on a jihad. We do not need to die in such a war in order to go to heaven.

"Non-Muslims may not understand this, but for Muslims this is important.

"We should remember the struggle of Prophet Muhammad: he did not die in a war and yet he found a place in heaven. This was also the case with several of his friends, they were not killed in war but still went to heaven."

Dr Mahathir said to think that by going to war, indulging in acts of terror, murdering people and in turn getting themselves killed was jihad and would make them martyrs was not in line with Islamic teaching.

On whether he viewed the attacks on New York and the United States' retaliation against Afghanistan as a clash between Islamic countries and the Western system, Dr Mahathir said this was not the case.

"I do not accept that this is an attack on Islam or Muslims because if they want to destroy all Muslims it is quite easy for them... if they fire a nuclear bomb, hundreds of millions of Muslims will be wiped out. But they did not do this."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had successfully neutralised terrorism.

"We not only fought against them (terrorists), but also launched a war to win the hearts and minds of the people so that they would not support the terrorists."

He said among the measures taken by the then Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, was to give citizenship to more than one million people who lived in Malaysia but did not have citizenship rights.

The Government, he said, also took various other actions such as providing those exposed to terrorists permanent residence, and business and employment opportunities.

"With this, they no longer felt marginalised and stopped supporting the terrorists."

Asked to comment on the detention of Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat's son under the Internal Security Act, he said this was done because Nik Adli returned from Afghanistan with the intention of toppling the Government through force.

"This type of people usually directed themselves more at governments of Islamic countries, and because of their action most Islamic countries could not be developed and became weak.

"We will not allow our country to become weak just because there are a handful of irresponsible people planning to use violence to topple the Government because they were disappointed with the struggle through democracy by their group."

Asked to comment on a report in the Washington Post recently which considered Malaysia as one of the successful Islamic countries in terms of its per capita gross domestic product, Dr Mahathir said:

"To us, our struggle (jihad) is to develop our country until we become a developed nation, because when we become a developed nation there will be less pressure on us. They will acknowledge our ability."

Dr Mahathir said this was a better approach than going to war.

Asked whether the move by Pas members who burned the US flag following the attacks had marred Malaysia's image as a moderate and liberal country, Dr Mahathir said certain quarters were bent on portraying Malaysia as an extremist Islamic country.

"What can we get out of holding demonstrations. Can we cause the attacks on Afghanistan to stop just by displaying banners?"

"We should instead build our country to become more progressive and influential on the international arena. This is the approach this Government is taking," he said.

Asked how Malaysia would prepare to face the threat from extremist militant groups, Dr Mahathir said the authorities should have the capability to detect such groups early before they can grow.

"We also need information. We know there are people who have information about such threats.

"Unfortunately such information was not passed on to the Government."