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Keeping in touch with Malaysians in Pakistan

K.P. Waran in Islamabad

THE Malaysian High Commission is constantly in touch with those registered with its office in Islamabad through e-mail, telephone and personal contacts to keep it abreast of the situation in Pakistan.

High Commissioner Datuk Suffian Ahmad said the worst case scenario was that of massive demonstrations which could affect peace and stability.

"So far, President Pervez Musharraf's government has the situation under control with demonstrations limited to small groups in Karachi, Peshawar and Lahore and these too have been waning over the last few days," he said in an interview.

Suffian said the diplomatic corps' estimates showed that about 15 per cent of Pakistanis might be sympathetic to the Taliban and might react adversely in the event US-led forces decided to mount military strikes against Afghanistan.

There is calm in the country, judging from the situation where transport services, flight schedules and the business districts are operating smoothly.

Contingency plans have already been drawn up to evacuate the 450 Malaysian citizens, of which over 350 are students, if there is a breakdown in law and order.

He confirmed that Malaysian staff at the Petronas office here had left for home but added that this was because the petroleum company's operations here had not started yet.

The Tenaga Nasional Berhad venture here under the Liberty Plant project continues although the staff have sent their families back to Malaysia.

The High Commission has advised all Malaysians still in Pakistan not to venture out unless it was absolutely necessary and refrain from joining any processions or rallies as these could turn nasty.

He said all major political parties and associations had thrown their support behind Musharraf since they realised that it was the right thing to do. This would help Pakistan emerge from its current economic doldrums.

There is hope and expectations among Pakistanis that the US will be sincere in contributing to the economic upliftment of the country and not merely using it to facilitate the military strikes.

"It is hoped that Pakistan will benefit from the lifting of the sanctions and that allowing the use of its airspace and facilities to strike on Afghanistan will bring about reduction of terrorism, failing which there will be dissatisfaction all over this country."

It is important to accept that Osama bin Laden and his network of guerillas are still only prime suspects for the terrorist strikes on New York and Washington.

"All nations have to work together to overcome the problem since terrorist groups have different agendas and targets. That is why Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had called for an international conference to define terrorism and identify them."

He also chided the Western media which had painted a negative image of Islam aimed at confusing the rest of the world.

"They do not call (Timothy) McVeigh a Christian terrorist nor highlight the religious differences of those involved in guerilla activities in Belfast yet are quick to grab the opportunity to downgrade Islam whenever a Muslim is involved in terrorism."

He said the type of Islam that the Taliban have been propagating was

very different and not in line with the times. This is because they do not allow girls to go to school, women to work and men to even shave.

He said the world was watching what the United States' next course of action would be and if its response was disproportionate to the attacks on the country or unfair in the eyes of people.

The sympathy it had gained over the attacks on New York and Washington could turn into anger against the US and its leadership.

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