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Mahathir-War

MAHATHIR CAUTIONS ASEAN OVER INVOLVEMENT IN WAR

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 2 (Bernama) -- Asean should not be participating in a war, if one does break out, but instead be a moderating force in urging for an end to such conflict, the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"We should really not participate in war. If we do, we will only help to escalate the problems because an all-out war is the wrong solution, because many innocent people are going to be killed," he said during an interview with four Asean journalists on the "In Conversation" programme aired over TV3 tonight.

He was asked on the scenario for Malaysia and Asean if the United States did launch a strike against Afghanistan in retaliation to terror attacks which destroyed the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York and damaged the nerve centre of American military, the Pentagon in Washington on Sept 11, causing thousands to lose their lives.

Elaborating, Dr Mahathir said outsiders might not like the Taliban government in Afghanistan and this might well be the case for Afghan people themselves.

"But they have no means of overthrowing the government. In a war, those who dislike the Taliban are also going to be killed. So it is not fair to have an all-out war against them," he said.

The Taliban rulers of Afghanistan have admitted that they are hiding Osama bin Laden, the Saudi millionaire Washington has named as the "prime suspect" of the deadly attacks on American soil.

Dr Mahathir was the first Asean leader interviewed in the hour-long first episode watched by an estimated 300 million people in the region.

It was the result of a collaboration between Malaysia's TV3, Thailand's iTV, RCTI of Indonesia and ABS-CBN of the Philippines.

Apart from war and terrorism, Dr Mahathir also fielded a wide variety of questions including on Asean, the economy, attempts by certain people to establish an Islamic state in Malaysia and globalisation.

Dr Mahathir said strictly speaking, international actions should be initiated by the United Nations (UN) and not by any one country.

"But there is a tendency for people to bypass the UN and this happens especially with the big powers, strong powers. And because of that, decisions are made which are not really reflecting the interest of the world as a whole," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the upcoming meeting of Asean heads of government in Brunei Darussalam would likely discuss events in the US and its repercussions to this region.

He said: "I think whether we like it or not, we will have to discuss what happened in the US simply because Asean is actually a trade bloc and our prosperity depends on trade. When a market is hurt or not doing well, we will suffer."

"So we will need to discuss this in order to find ways and means of overcoming that and putting in place new plans, alternatives that will help the economy to recover."

To a question, he said Asean must be against terrorism and in order to deal with it, military action was not enough as the fight would be against an "invisible" enemy.

"It is not like fighting a country. (When) you fight a country you know where the borders are. (When) you fight terrorists, you are fighting an

invisible enemy. You don't even know whether the man who is speaking to you is a terrorist or not...You can kill a thousand terrorists but how do you know there are no other terrorists," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the main way of fighting terrorists was to remove the causes of terrorism, just like Malaysia did in its fight against its own terrorists (Communists) from 1948 to 1990.

"We must look into the causes, why is it some people are willing to kill themselves in order to achieve something that they believe in. If we find the reason why and we tackle it, then more people will avoid having to be terrorists. If we don't remove the causes, we are going to see terrorism forever," he said.

Dr Mahathir admitted that the attacks on the US would be affecting the Malaysian economy "a bit" as there would be an economic downturn of unprecedented proportion in America.

He said American consumers might not consume goods produced by Malaysia as much as they used to prior to the Sept 11 attacks.

"We will suffer of course and so will many other countries," he said.

On the perception of the world regarding so-called Muslim terrorists, Dr Mahathir said it was unfortunate that those said to be involved in the US attacks were Muslims.

"There has been terrorism in Japan. There are Hindu terrorists, Jewish terrorists, too. In this case it happens to be Muslim terrorists," he said.

Dr Mahathir said perhaps those who were jittery were not able to separate terrorists from ordinary Muslims, resulting in instances where Muslim travellers had to undergo questioning by the authorities.

"They assume that anybody who has a Muslim name could be potential terrorists. So in the end, it turns out to be an attack against Muslims, or suspicion against Muslims. And yet there are terrorists who are non-Muslims, who are maybe even Christians," he said.

Nevertheless, the prime minister expressed hope that common sense would prevail and that over time, the anger being felt by Americans would lessen and they would begin to think rationally about what they really needed to do.

"When that happens, I think their reactions and actions will be much more constructive," he added.

-- BERNAMA
MAM AHH RYN