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Make no mistake: Extremism is no fad

PREVENTION is better than cure. The wisdom of this old adage is still apt in the modern age in the war against terrorism and its adherents. Malaysia's laws to maintain national security such as the Internal Security Act and the Restricted Residents Ordinance, have been effective in curbing terrorist activities. Hence, the country's peace and political stability.

However, terrorism as understood in Malaysia relates traditionally to communists, communalists and racialists. But recent events, especially the terrorist attacks on the US, have highlighted the dangers to national security emanating from religious extremism and militancy.

Another trend of terrorism that needs to be addressed is that of its global nature. It reflects the success of our anti-terrorist legislation that the Government may only be amending existing laws pertaining to national security to deal more effectively with modern day terrorism. Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has said that the Government does not plan to draft new laws. Rather, the Government is looking at the effectiveness of implementing existing laws, which are to be further streamlined.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has again warned that there are certain groups and people in the country who are unhappy with the government's success and are trying to create trouble and resort to terrorism to topple the government. The people of all races should be alert to the evil nature of terrorism and its perpetrators for the sake of their own safety and well-being. Malaysians should not live in a fools paradise and think that radical Islam is a passing fad of the militants and will soon go out of fashion. Far from it. They should face the cold reality squarely: militant Islam will remain a permanent factor for a while in Malaysian life.

Unless the people, especially the middle class and the elite, stand up and pluck up the courage to confront the challenges posed by the militants, they may find themselves living under their rule one day. They must make their choice, hard as it is, and not allow inaction to decide their fate. They may regret it later when it is too late. They must actively support the Government in its efforts against religious militancy and radicalism.

Young minds are being subverted and taught to hate the Government by religious zealots in schools, colleges and universities but, worse still, in the kindergardens as well. What is sad is that there could be potential terrorists masquerading as religious leaders and politicians in political parties.

The other countries in the region also have potential breeding grounds for terrorists from among the religious extremist groups in their midst. Their potential for terror should be nipped in the bud. But to do this effectively, Asean countries need to support and help each other to eliminate any sanctuary for terrorists.

Terrorist plots hatched in one country could be targetted against a neighbouring country. We welcome the initiative by Malaysia in taking the lead to organise an Asean conference on terrorism. It's high time.

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