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Mahathir-Moderates

M'SIA'S SUCCESS PARTLY DUE TO STRONG SUPPORT OF MODERATE MUSLIMS

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 5 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the "very strong support" of the majority moderates among Muslims in the country has helped make Malaysia a successful nation.

" In Malaysia, it's true, we have been more successful than other Muslim countries. This demands a strong will, a steadfastness, a capacity to accept criticism, but also the support of the majority.

" I personally enjoy a very strong support of the Muslim majority who are moderates in my country. And this is why I could succeed," he said in an interview with the French magazine L'Expansion carried in its Nov 22-Dec 5 issue.

Governments in other Muslims countries were unable to be successful as they could not get popular support and they remained very poor, Dr Mahathir said when asked whether, being a country with a Muslim majority, Malaysia's success due to a stroke of good luck.

" In every Muslim community, you will find a minority of the people who would like to create an Islamic state and will try to stop the government from developing the country economically," he said.

Dr Mahathir said instead of encouraging Muslims to study and acquire skills, the minority insisted that Muslims only study religion and nothing else and this prevented Muslims from catching up with lost time.

" All Muslim countries are aware of the scourge of such extremism. A big chunk of our energy, that of the Muslims, is wasted on managing these internal tensions," he said.

Citing that the big Muslim empire of the past was founded on Islamic teachings, he said if all Muslims followed strictly the teachings of Islam, they would experience the biggest success on the planet.

" Today, certain extremists distort these teachings to serve their personal and political ambition," he said.

On Muslim terrorism in Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said the country had seen the emergence of a group comprising Muslims bent on turn Malaysia into what they call an Islamic state.

Internal extremist groups, which could not impose themselves through the ballot boxes, tried to topple the government by going to Pakistan, then Afghanistan to be trained by Osama bin Laden and the Taliban, he said referring to the Saudi millionaire and ousted rulers of Afghanistan being hunted down by American-led forces following the Sept 11 attacks on the United States.

" But to accuse us of hiding criminals solely based on the grounds that some terrorists had been in Malaysia, this does not make any sense," he said when asked on claims that Malaysia is also used by one of the pilots of the Sept 11 attacks to make contact with some extremist groups here.

" We had identified, detained and put them (the extremists) in prison. We had even prevented an attack against American sailors in one of our ports,...we know how to do it.

"But of course, if a foreign terrorist whom we do not know come to our country as a tourist, we are not sure of being able to catch him," the prime minister said.

He said the terrorists responsible for the Sept 11 attacks were not even suspects in the eyes of the local authorities.

Dr Mahathir said no one accused the Swiss government of colluding with the terrorists even though some of those involved on the Sept 11 attacks

had also stayed in Switzerland.

On the use of the Euro to counterbalance the weight of the US dollar, Dr Mahathir said that Asean countries would have liked to choose the Euro but the European companies often refused to deal with anything else than the greenback.

" How do you expect us to have more faith in your currency than you yourself?" he said ending the one-hour interview held last month at his office in Putrajaya, the new federal administrative capital.

The magazine described Malaysia as the only country with a Muslim majority which has managed to steer itself away from destitution and experienced economic success.

L'Expansion attributed this to Dr Mahathir who has led the country for more than 20 years.

" It is him who has planned the development, applying protectionism but all the while striving to make Malaysia an export champion, building mosques and airports with the same vigour, favouring the Bumiputeras while not forgetting the Chinese and the Indians who are at the heart of the business community, " it stated.

Describing Dr Mahathir as a friend of French President Jacques Chirac, it said that the prime Minister has stood out to his provocative stands worthy of a "de Gaulle or a Lee Kuan Yew, denouncing the international financial system, criticising the American domination, affirming that the Asian values are superior than the individualistic and materialistic West".

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