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`Motion has come too late'

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A MOTION to discuss the US attacks on Afghanistan moved by the Opposition turned out to be more of a political battle between government and opposition MPs.

Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Dr Leo Michael Toyad said the motion raised by Dr Syed Azman Syed Ahmad Nawawi (Pas-Kuala Terengganu) came too late and was merely to gain political mileage for the Opposition.

He said the Government had repeatedly echoed its stand - which is against terrorism and the use of violence to achieve something.

"This was made clear by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in the House on Monday," he said, adding that Malaysia had taken all the necessary steps like agreeing to freeze the accounts of terrorists, if any, as requested by the United States.

Earlier, Syed Azman had said the Dewan Rakyat should protest against the US attacks on Afghanistan which began on Sunday as war was not a solution to problems.

He said war would only cause thousands of innocent lives to be lost.

"Can the aircraft and artillery differentiate between a Taliban, women and innocent children?"

"Even the labels given to Muslims of late by the international media such as Islamic terrorists, extremists and militants were unfair," he said, adding that Islam was a peace-loving religion that was strongly against violence.

Pas, he said, was strongly against violence and terrorists, and the party sympathised with the innocent lives lost.

Dr Tan Seng Giaw (DAP-Kepong) urged the US alliance to stop attacking Afghanistan and echoed Dr Mahathir's view that an international conference should be held to resolve the issue.

Saupi Daud (Keadilan-Tanah Merah) said the United Nations should define violence, why it happened and its actual cause.

"It has to be studied why there are parties willing to kill themselves for a cause," he said when debating the motion.

Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (BN-Bagan Datoh) said Pas, instead of criticising violence abroad, should focus on what was happening on the home front.

"All violent movements such as Kumpulan Militan Malaysia and Al-Ma'unah have been linked to Pas and I feel that they (Pas) should start by eradicating acts of violence here first," he said.

Mohamed Aziz (BN-Sri Gading) agreed with Ahmad Zahid and urged Pas to start by opposing violence and advising its members to stop associating themselves with violence.

He also said Pas should support the Internal Security Act as it was enacted with the main aim of curbing violence.

Datuk Ruhanie Ahmad (BN-Parit Sulong) said the United States' motives in attacking Afghanistan were dubious.

"Its main motive may be to eradicate terrorism, but it is questionable whether it has the aim to achieve something bigger and more strategic," he said.

Toyad said calls for an international conference were made repeatedly by Dr Mahathir, who had written to US President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair on the matter.

"Dr Mahathir had also told Bush that there was a need to define

terrorism and to get to the root of the problem in order to find a permanent solution," he said.

He said Pas was "too late in moving the motion" as the Barisan Nasional Government had clearly stated Malaysia's stand on the attacks.

"There is no need for further discussion of the matter and Pas and the other opposition parties should not use this as a forum to gain political mileage," Toyad added.

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