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Mahathir-Terrorists

MOTIVES BEHIND SEPT 11 ATTACKS NEED STUDYING, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 5 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that in the search for solutions to international terrorism there is a need to first study what motivates a group of people to attack the United States on Sept 11.

" The big question is this: what was it that could have motivated these people?" Dr Mahathir said in an interview last month with the French magazine L'Expansion at his office in Putrajaya.

The magazine, which described Dr Mahathir as "a leader of Malaysia - the only successful Muslim country - focused the interview, meant for its Nov 22-Dec 5 issue, on terrorism and Islam.

In seeking solutions to that question, Dr Mahathir said that as a doctor, he started by searching for the source of the illness and would not be happy to treat the pain merely with some aspirins.

" Most importantly, we'll have to try to understand why intelligent, well-rounded and relatively well-off people who have families, can decide to slam a plane into a tower!

"If we content ourselves with saying that they must be crazy people, we would not be able to treat the problem," he said.

In the Sept 11 attacks, terrorists used hijacked jetliners to plough into the twin towers of New York's World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in Washington, killing at least 4,000 people.

When asked what would be his answer to reasons for the Sept 11 attacks, Dr Mahathir said: " I feel that it is linked to the situation in West Asia. The feeling of discontent regarding this matter is widespreadly felt in the Muslim world."

He said with one billion Muslims, surely there would be a handful of extremists willing to kill themselves with the hope that this would help to fight the terrorism that they themselves had to endure.

" For in the eyes of Muslims, the attacks by Jews also constitute an act of terror, state terrorism," he said.

On the interviewer's suggestion that the situation in West Asia was not something new and it could not all by itself fuel that much resentment among Muslims, the prime minister replied: "Muslims have the impression that the entire world is oppressing them."

Dr Mahathir said that in Bosnia some 200,000 Muslims had to be massacred by the Serbs before the world began to react, while in Kosovo, the Muslims once again were attacked by the Serbs.

In Chechnya, a lot more Muslims died simply because they wanted to free themselves from the grip of an iron rule of the Russians, he said.

" I could add Kashmir, Sudan and of course, Iraq where 500,000 children died due to the lack of food and medicine caused by the sanctions," he said.

Iraq has for more than a decade been subject to United Nations' sanctions following its invasion of Kuwait.

Dr Mahathir said Muslims thought that other people accused them easily of terrorism whereas other terrorists were not distinguished by their ethnic or religious belonging.

" When talking about Palestine, nobody in the West speaks of Jewish terrorism like people do when it comes to Muslim terrorism," he said.

Recalling the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma for which the US' own citizen Timothy McVeigh has been convicted and sentenced to death,

Dr Mahathir said the first American reaction then was to say that it was the work of "Muslim terrorism".

" Moreover, McVeigh surely had accomplices. How is it that they could not be found, that people did not even try to do it just like they are trying to destroy Muslim terrorists?" he said.

Asked whether there are similarities between the Sept 11 attacks on the US and the ensuing American-led retaliatory military strikes against Afghanistan, Dr Mahathir said: "...it's not actually comparable. But it's a fact that, just like the terrorist attacks had cost the lives of innocent people, in the same manner, the American attacks on Afghanistan are going to exact the lives of other innocent people."

He said what was worse was that those attacks on Afghanistan were not going to contribute towards the fight against terrorism but only the opposite effect since no one knew where the real terrorists were.

" Therefore, it is not by attacking Afghanistan that we would be contributing towards eliminating terrorists who are hiding in Europe, in Arab countries or even in the United States.

" On the other hand, numerous Muslim countries are going to have the feeling that it is less a matter of chasing the terrorists than a revenge," Dr Mahathir said.

He said it was for this reason that Malaysia do not support the military strikes against Afghanistan which have entered the third month.

Asked about his opinion of Osama bin Laden's objective for carrying out those attacks, Dr Mahathir said: "... I don't take it as a fact that these terrorists were the messengers of Osama.

" I don't dispute that he is the head of a group of terrorists. Some of them had even trained Malaysians hoping to see that they would go back to our country and topple my government.

"So I don't have any particular affection for Osama," he said referring to the fugitive Saudi millionaire, who Washington suspected to be behind the Sept 11 attacks alongside his al-Qaeda network.

Dr Mahathir added there was nothing to guarantee that striking out Osama would bring an end to terrorist acts.

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