

16 NOV 2001

Mahathir-Terrorism

ONLY FORCIBLE SEPARATION CAN SOLVE ARAB-ISRAEL CONFLICT, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 16 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Arab-Israeli conflict, which has become the principal cause of terrorism, must be solved by forcible separation of the Palestinians and Israelis by a strong United Nations (UN) force.

Retaliations between the Arabs and Israelis would not solve the conflict and there was no sign yet of the fighting coming to an end, he said.

"Only forcible separation of the two people by a strong UN force can do this. The Palestinians are willing to have the UN peace-keeping force but the Israelis object.

"The world pander to the wishes of the Israelis and so the killings and terror goes on," Dr Mahathir said opening a conference on terrorism at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) here.

In his keynote address, Dr Mahathir said in the fight against terrorists and terrorism, the causes of the anger and frustration of the terrorists must be studied and action taken to remove these causes.

"I believe that the principal cause is the Palestine issue," he said.

Dr Mahathir said applying international pressure on the warring sides to cease fighting was not practical.

"Even if Arafat (Palestinian president Yasser Arafat) agrees to a ceasefire, he cannot possibly stop his people, individuals, bitter at having lost their children or members of their family or their friends from continuing to attack and kill the Israelis.

"Each attack by Arabs invariably resulted in more Arabs than Israelis being killed and the Israelis would attack the Arabs with deadly accuracy and the Arabs would retaliate ineffectively," Dr Mahathir said.

There was a great deal of anger in the Muslim world which the West could not understand, he said.

The prime minister said the Muslim world, weak and unable to be of any help to the Palestinians, saw the West's unwillingness to stop the Israelis as a sign that "the West is anti-Palestine, anti-Arab and anti-Muslim".

Dr Mahathir said most Muslims only felt the anger and would talk but would do nothing.

"But among the billion Muslims there must be those whose anger cannot be contained. These are the people who will resort to terror tactics," he said.

It was reasonable to believe that if there was no Palestinian issue and the Palestinians were not being oppressed and no children were being killed, the anger of the Arabs and the Muslims would not be there or would be much less, he said.

"Certainly there would not be those who would be willing to kill themselves in the horrible fashion on 11th September," he said referring to the Sept 11 attacks by terrorists who used hijacked jetliners to plough into the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington.

Dr Mahathir said the belief that those terrorists acted in that manner because of poverty or jealousy for the good life and freedom of other people did not reflect a deep knowledge of the terrorist mind.

"Those who hijacked and crashed the aircraft are not fanatically illiterate who only see heaven in after-life.

"These people came from the richer Muslim countries, countries where generous governments give allowances and subsidised the life of the

people," Dr Mahathir said.

Dr Mahathir said there was a need to understand their minds and mentality so as not to glorify them but to understand why they had resorted to terrorism.

"We need to do this if we want to understand the reason why they did this and if we don't then we will not be able to remove the causes and reduce the incidence of terrorism," he added.

"Revenge is sweet. But if we are going to liquidate the culprits almost completely as is likely to happen if we simply bomb and rocket Afghanistan then we won't even achieve the revenge that we are after," he said.

He said the terrorists would probably feel sorry that they had brought death and destruction to their host but they were likely to feel angrier and be more determined to continue with their acts of terror.

"So there is no revenge," he said.

Dr Mahathir said if the world, including the Muslim world were to be asked to participate in the elimination of terrorists and terrorism, then all terrorists irrespective of their race and religion or the particular acts of terrorism that they were involved in must be the target for elimination.

"And these must include state terrorists as well, including the Israeli Government of Ariel Sharon, the man responsible for the massacre of thousands of Palestinians in Shabra and Shatila and is still the man behind the systematic killings of the Palestinians today," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the world must be serious about the fight against terrorists.

He said that it would never be completely wiped out but it certainly could be reduced and rendered less frightening for the world.

He said terrorists should not be identified by race, religion and country but by their acts.

Dr Mahathir said removing the cause of terrorism would be the better and immediate solution rather than hunting them down which would be very difficult and take a long time.

He said once the causes had been removed, support for the terrorists would very much be reduced if not cease altogether as in the case of Malaysia, once the terrorists lost their support base, sooner or later they gave up their activity.

--BERNAMA

AKT ZS AAM