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PM: Military action not the way

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia does not want to be involved in any war against any country because it feels conflict is not the right approach to resolving problems.

He said Malaysia would be forced to object to any war carried out in the name of punishing countries which sponsored terrorism.

Alluding to the military build-up by the United States now poised to attack Afghanistan, Dr Mahathir said even if the country was occupied by Western powers, it would not guarantee the end of violence.

"Maybe the terrorists will come from other places. Not all those involved in the US attacks live in Afghanistan.

"What should be done is to eradicate the reasons which prompted the attacks in New York and Washington," he said after chairing a two-hour meeting of the Umno supreme council at Menara Dato' Onn.

The council deliberated at length on the attacks and Malaysia's stand on the issue.

Dr Mahathir, who is party president, said Malaysia's opposition to an attack against Afghanistan stemmed from the fact that innocent Afghans might become victims.

"We do not agree because although the country is ruled by the Taliban who have refused to hand over Osama as demanded by the US, maybe many of the Afghans are not supporters of the Taliban.

"But since they live there, they have to follow the ways determined by the Taliban," he said.

He said the Government supported the US in its efforts to hunt down terrorists as Malaysia was against all sorts of violence.

"We hope that those who will be hunted down are terrorists. We hope that in the efforts to hunt them down, no attacks will be made on any country."

Dr Mahathir reiterated Malaysia's stand that a conference to discuss terrorism be held. If possible, it should be organised by the United Nations involving all countries in the world.

Even if the conference was only able to gather a few Western and Muslim countries, it should be regarded as an important step towards eradicating terrorism.

The Prime Minister said he had written to his British counterpart Tony Blair stating Malaysia's stand, which would also be conveyed to all Malaysian ambassadors and high commissioners to ensure consistency.

"I stated to Blair the importance of overcoming several matters which cause terrorists to become so angry and to suggest that an observer team be sent to Palestine to separate the Israelis and Palestinians.

"I have received Blair's reply but he did not address that suggestion. He said he would reply to that later. On the other hand, he brought up (in his reply) a separate matter, and this I will work on."

Asked to elaborate on this, Dr Mahathir replied: "It is regarding Myanmar. I will reply to him on that, and I hope he will respond to me on our suggestion for a meeting."

Dr Mahathir also said that Malaysia was uneasy about the Taliban Government and Osama as they advocated violence in the name of Islam.

The Prime Minister was asked whether there was proof that Malaysians had joined the Taliban and were now militant.

He replied in the affirmative, saying that some had been arrested when they attempted to rob a bank.

"From them (the robbers), we have received information on those involved and obtained documentary proof, including those who had been in Afghanistan.

"There are pictures of them with Afghans, and their stand, which is militant. They are all from Pas but it seems they are acting independently because they feel that the democratic way could never bring power to the party.

"So the manner which can bring power to Pas is through militancy. And they also feel that democracy is not the way of Islam, because of that they rejected it."

Dr Mahathir said this group tried to establish an Islamic Government through violence, and after that there would be no more democracy in the country.