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PM: All countries must get together to deal with terrorism

Patvinder Singh; Nelson Fernandez

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today terrorism should be viewed as a crime that has to be dealt with by the whole world and called on all countries to get together and discuss the matter seriously without taking sides.

"I am of the opinion that all countries of the world need to sit down together to discuss this matter seriously without taking sides.

"Islamic countries cannot take sides with Islamic countries and non-Islamic countries too cannot take sides with non-Islamic countries or take sides with whoever is a friend," he said.

The Prime Minister said this to reporters in the compound of the United States Embassy here after signing a condolence book for victims of Tuesday's terrorist attacks on New York and Washington.

"We should view acts of terrorism as a crime that has to be dealt with by the whole world," Dr Mahathir said, adding that problems could not be solved by retaliation and more retaliation.

"That is why we do not agree with methods of terrorism like this to solve problems. We should find a way that resolves the source of this matter."

Asked if Malaysia would provide assistance to the US if called upon, Dr Mahathir said: "Yes, whatever we can do. You must remember that we also have some people in the World Trade Center who are still missing."

Asked whether the Cabinet directive to enhance security at strategic sites would remain in force, Dr Mahathir said:

"Oh yes, we have to be alert all the time. With terrorism there is no period when it ends. So we have to be on the alert all the time."

The Cabinet had on Wednesday directed increased security at all strategic locations in the country as a precautionary measure.

Asked about the reports of threats against the Muslims in the US following the terrorist attacks, Dr Mahathir said:

"Well, I suppose that is a natural reaction but I hope that it will be curbed as quickly as possible because it is not the right thing but, of course, people at the moment are not in control of their emotions."

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, echoing the sentiments expressed by Dr Mahathir, said Malaysia would support any form of action to get the international community to work together in the fight against terrorism.

"It is imperative that there should be strong co-operation among all countries to combat terrorism. We will support any action in the hope that acts of terrorism can be overcome," he said at a Press conference at Wisma Putra.

Asked if Malaysia would support the US should the latter take military action against Afghanistan, which had refused to hand over main suspect Osama bin Laden, he said:

"Whatever action eventually taken, there must be assurances that civilians will not be affected."

He said it was the view of most countries that those responsible should be punished, but cautioned that careful planning must be made to ensure there was no room for mistakes.

"In the process, we have to make sure we are punishing the right people," he added.