

11 NOV 2001
Mahathir-US
PM REGRETS US' MOVE

PUTRAJAYA, Nov 11 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed regret over the US' move in placing greater focus on Muslims and Islamic countries in its counter-terrorism measures.

He said this was most unfortunate as it was now generally known that there were also terrorists who were non-Muslims.

"It would appear as if more and more focus has been placed on Muslims and Islamic countries.

"This is rather regrettable because we know that even now there are terrorists who are non-Muslims," he told reporters after participating in the Royal Malaysia Police/Tenaga Nasional Berhad international endurance ride 2001 at the Universiti Tenaga Nasional (Uniten) campus here.

He was asked to comment on the US State Department's move to place visa restrictions on Muslim men from Malaysia and 24 other countries to tighten immigration policies in the wake of the Sept 11 terrorist attacks, from next week.

The 24 countries are Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell was quoted by news agencies as saying that the rules would be temporary to make sure that Americans were safe.

When the rules come into effect, male Muslims aged between 16 and 45 from the 25 Islamic countries planning to go to the US would have to complete a detailed questionnaire and would have to wait for 20 days for their visas.

Dr Mahathir said that at the moment, it was not clear whether the US was a target of terrorist groups.

"Maybe their target is not the United States. But we also know that in Oklahoma, the person responsible for the explosion and destruction was a non-Muslim. A large number of people were also killed there.

"I do hope that this is a temporary move," he said.

DAP chairman Lim Kit Siang said the US State Department's visa restrictions are both baseless and unfair.

He said it could only strengthen international opinion that the US was conducting a war between the West and Islam in its response to the Sept 11 terrorist attacks.

"The US State Department could not have come out with more crude, blunt and insensitive visa restrictions which tantamount to putting all the male Muslim men between the ages of 16 and 45 among the 1.3 billion Muslims in the world on notice that they are all suspected as potential terrorists until they are declared "cleared" by the terrorist task force in Washington," he said in a statement.

Saying parliament should take a serious view of the US visa restrictions, he suggested that an all-party delegation should be sent to protest to the United States ambassador.

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