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PM: Fanatics to blame (HL)

Ramlan Said

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said the refusal by certain quarters to admit that Malaysia is an Islamic country has spawned groups bent on toppling the Government using violence.

He said the groups adopted this approach because they wanted to instil hatred for their political enemies, which was the Government, not realising that it had bred people having no qualms about using violence to achieve their goals.

Dr Mahathir said these groups might view their "state of denial" as something not serious and just a strategy to win support but some of their members really believed that Malaysia was unIslamic.

This was despite the recognition of the Muslim world that Malaysia was a model Islamic country.

"As a result, these people resort to violence and force to unseat the Government. For them, the creation of an Islamic state using democratic means is not sufficient.

"They want to kill, terrorise and seek the assistance of foreign fanatics to realise their plans but, in reality, it is this kind of action that has impeded the development of Islamic countries," said Dr Mahathir in his Merdeka Day message in conjunction with the 44th National Day tomorrow.

His speech was telecast live over Radio Televisyen Malaysia.

Speaking at length on the abuse of religion for political gains, the Prime Minister said these fanatics were actually traitors to Islam and Muslims. He said those led astray formed militant groups aimed at overthrowing the Government, convincing themselves that the people would rise in support of their cause.

"They also convinced themselves that they are invincible and possess supernatural powers. They do not consider their violence as a sin because they consider those they are fighting against as non-Muslims or practising unIslamic ways.

"That's why, to them, robbing a bank is not a sin as banks practise usury. They accepted many more deviant teachings to enable them to commit other crimes."

He said that while those using violence to topple the Government faced the brunt of the laws for their actions, the people responsible for fanning their anger escaped scot free.

"These people will never admit they are part of the movement. They will continue using the strategy of hatred for political interests."

Dr Mahathir also warned of the danger that could be caused to the nation by misguided beliefs, including to innocent parties like the young Malay generation.

"They are taught the culture of hatred to the extent that they cannot concentrate on their studies. The same is happening to teachers and lecturers, many of whom are involved in sowing hatred against certain parties instead of imparting knowledge.

"What's more unfortunate is that religious teachers entrusted in inculcating values in their charges have strayed from their responsibility, and this has weakened the faith of Muslim students," he said.

As a result, moral decay set in until there were those prepared to denounce Islam, worship the devil, blaspheme the Quran, commit rapes and murders and disown their parents. What's more shocking was that some of

those involved were students of religious schools.

Dr Mahathir said fortunately the people were now more aware of attempts by those manipulating the religion.

"Until now, the challenge to them to specify the set-up of the Islamic state that they purportedly want to create has not been met.

"Just saying that it will be based on the Al-Quran and hadith (sayings of the Prophet) is not acceptable as Islam does not teach its followers to reject unity, labelling others who do not conform to their beliefs as infidels, spreading lies and many other practices prohibited by the religion," Dr Mahathir said.

While other races continued to progress, the Malays seemed to regress, he said.

The Prime Minister said the community believed they would always be protected, regardless of which Government was in power.

"Because of this, the Malays are no longer united in protecting their rights and equipping themselves with knowledge.

"The rift is getting worse and they are not even willing to meet and discuss problems and dangers facing the community."

Dr Mahathir said the denial syndrome was also evident among detractors of the country's development.

He said while many including foreigners felt Malaysia had already attained developed status, there were those who disputed this, citing the presence of squatters in the country to back up their argument.

"Yes, it is true we have poor squatters but we can also see some squatter houses equipped with Astro and the occupants owning cars. Do not deny the development that we have achieved by pointing to the poverty of certain groups," he said.

He said the fact remained that unlike other developing countries, Malaysians had the choice - either to work or remained jobless, to stay in squatter colonies or move to proper housing and to suffer or not to suffer.

The country had been independent for 44 years, and the Prime Minister felt Malaysians had the right to be proud of their achievements.

"In conjunction with our National Day, let us renew our commitment to stay united and be together in developing and defending our country, regardless of whether we are Bumiputeras or non-Bumiputeras.

"Malaysia is our country. Let's defend it so that we will continue to be independent, free, sovereign, progressive, prosperous and respected by the world community," he said.

On the economy, Dr Mahathir said although Malaysia was affected by the United States' economic slowdown, it was not experiencing a recession.

He said due to declining exports to developed countries, new markets in West Asia and Africa were being explored.

"Even better, these new markets will accept non-electronics products manufactured by local companies."

On tourism, Dr Mahathir expressed gratitude that Malaysia had been receiving an increasing number of tourists with more than one million visiting the country monthly in the first four months of this year.

"Many of them are from Arab countries who stay much longer. This is better compared to receiving more tourists but who only stay between three and four days," he said.

Taking a swipe at countries which once harboured the intention of seeing the Government replaced by people of their choice, Dr Mahathir said they now realised that these people were extremists who manipulated the religion for their own self-gain.

"Their ties with this extremist group will not be better than what they are enjoying now with the present Government.

"They are disappointed with this reality and efforts to discredit the Government have declined," he said.

Since Malaysia practises democracy, Dr Mahathir said, only the people had the right to determine their leaders.

He said democracy had its flaws as demonstrated by troubles faced by many countries practising the system.

"Countries in the West which practise democracy know how to control themselves, having only two or three parties.

"But they encourage countries which have just embraced democracy to have numerous political parties.

"As a result, no strong and respectable Government could be formed. Obviously these countries are deprived of stability, hence no development can be carried out."

On international relations, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia could feel proud as the developing world looked upon it as a model. The recognition was attested by the increasing number of embassies and high commissions based in Kuala Lumpur, which now stood at more than 100.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia maintained close ties with all countries but its willingness to speak up against any injustice in the world did not go down well with some.