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Wake-up call to deal with zealots

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DOES one bad apple spoil the whole bunch? Probably so. After all I have never heard of a good apple turning a bunch of bad ones around. The only solution to the problem would be to weed out the spoilt ones so that mankind can enjoy the juicy fruit throughout their lifetime.

So the task of weeding out the bad apples in society should be equally borne by everyone failing which we will all end up as rotten fruits. It is the same with getting rid of mindless terrorists blinded by myopic ideals that they would go to any extent to highlight their "cause" including taking the lives of innocent people.

The past week has been a harrowing and emotional one for many of us as we saw the events of the terrorist acts in New York and Washington unfold right in front of our eyes - thanks to "live" pictures from satellite television.

The graphic scenes had many fooled into thinking it was another Hollywood blockbuster with Lucas Digital's Industrial Light & Magic in charge of special effects.

Soon it dawned on people that the screams of those fleeing the carnage were real and that innocent lives in the four hijacked aeroplanes, those in the World Trade Center towers and on the ground were snuffed out deliberately by a bunch of mad men.

Nations and people throughout the world continue to mourn those who perished in the terrorist strikes and condolences from every nook and corner of the world is pouring into the US. The few who rejoiced at the destruction would surely need to have their heads examined as rational minds would not condone the wanton killing of innocent people.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad echoed the sentiments of many when he said 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.

If anything, the events in New York and Washington should be a wake-up call for the world to deal with the spectre of terrorism. For far too long the "superpowers" have been funding and training groups of people to create trouble and undermine governments, be they be duly elected or not.

Tonnes of weapons are provided, expertise on clandestine operations are transferred and the groups are often backed up with air strikes and other firepower.

After a while, these groups originally identified by fancy names such as "freedom fighters", "crusaders of religion", "movements against oppression" and "supporters of the will of the people" eventually turn up to be nothing but a bunch of bandits who take pleasure in living their lives at the end of a gun. As can be seen in many parts of the world after their so-called cause has evaporated they go about robbing and ruining other people's lives since it is an easier option than to find a job and embark on a decent living.

There is an urgent need for the world to strike a deal in reducing the amount of weapons and ammunition that are being manufactured. If there is

a drastic reduction in weaponry and steps are taken to destroy those already in circulation, the world will be a safer place to live in.

It is disheartening to note that people of different races, cultures and religions instead of coming together to make a strong stand on terrorism are instead attacking each other in the aftermath of the terror acts in the US.

Muslims in the developed world had to attend prayers under heavy security last Friday, nervous and angry about harassment and threats.

Many believe western media coverage of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon had singled their religion out for blame and fuelled a growing backlash with increasing e-mail and other threats, assaults and even killings.

Anxious Americans have descended on gun shops and military surplus stores in droves, hoping to reassure themselves with firepower in response to the horrific attacks with handgun, ammunition and gas mask sales increasing by as much as 50 per cent this week.

It is important that people take into cognisance that leaders of Muslim communities around the world had reiterated their condemnation of the terror attacks on the US as brutal and un-Islamic.

One cannot blame any religion or its practitioners merely because some wayward souls had decided to embark on a trail of violence. No religion condones murder and mayhem and those who think they are doing "God's work" by preferring to have blood on their hands are surely misguided and evil.

Let us hope that pragmatism, rationality and the respect for human lives continue to be the guiding principles of everyone's lives and at the same time we try to contribute as much as we can towards changing the paths of those "lost souls" who are heading the wrong route towards destructive ways.

Leaders should put their heads together and come up with immediate measures that would make this planet safe for all - including for those who at one point or another have to travel in an aeroplane or work in a high-rise building.

People should also be able to take a stroll everyday to their favourite coffee place without having to look up at the sky for falling debris and if this means a concerted effort to rid the world of gun-toting extremists, so be it.