

PM: US allegations baseless

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Excerpts of an interview between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Al-Jazeera TV which was broadcast live early yesterday morning.

AJ: Do you agree with the US view that Muslims are terrorists and linking Muslims solely with terrorist activities without inference to terrorist acts conducted by other races?

PM: I totally reject this general perception that Muslims are terrorists. There are terrorists from all races and religions. There are Christian terrorists in Northern Ireland. Buddhist terrorists in Japan. Hindu terrorists in India. Therefore, I do not agree with that perception. For me, we should define a person by his acts. If they are extremists and violent towards innocent members of the public, then we call them terrorists no matter who they are and from where they come from.

AJ: What would you say to refute US allegations against Malaysia?

PM: Their allegations are without basis. We demand that they furnish proof that the Sept 11 attacks originated from Malaysia. Until now there is no proof. We will definitely not allow our people to be questioned by outside parties. We will do it ourselves. Until now, there is nothing to convince us that our people and our youth had anything to do with the Sept 11 attacks.

AJ: The US has asked Islamic

PM: We are with them in the campaign against terrorism, so we are ready to help whenever required.

AJ: There are reports saying that the US has asked Malaysia to rid the country of Pas even though some of the party's supporters like the son of Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat has been arrested.

PM: The US did not ask us to do such a thing. I feel Pas too does not support the actions of some of its young members, including Nik Aziz's son. The action is committed by a number of the party's young members, that's the information we received. Therefore, there is no reason why we should rid the country of the party. We are a democratic Government; they have a right to form a party and express their views. That is why we leave it to the people to choose the Government.

AJ: Therefore, does this mean rumours saying Datuk Seri is working to rid the country of the party is untrue?

PM: It is untrue, I think Pas made up the story purposely to cultivate hatred among the *rakyat* towards the Government.

AJ: Last Friday's issue of the *Los Angeles Times* carried a statement from Datuk Seri criticising Muslim *ulama* for being the cause of the *ummah*

Islamic country, is Datuk Seri ready to defend *ulama* whose views are in line with the interests of the religion and the development of the race?

PM: Yes, we will co-operate with them. Many of them support our views that an Islamic country must progress, not regress.

AJ: It is as if Datuk Seri is accusing them of being the cause of the race extremists.

PM: They are not in the minority, their numbers are large, they do not deserve to be called *ulama* because their religious knowledge is shallow. But they claim they are *ulama* and what is sad is that many among those who are ignorant recognise these people as *ulama* and accept their views.

AJ: Datuk Seri is not only a leader of an Islamic country but also a thinker and writer. It cannot be denied that Datuk Seri has strategic views. In short, what is the reason for America and the West's pressure against Islamic

because they are not willing to put up with the calamity that has befallen them like in Palestine.

AJ: Will the services of Chief Justice Tan Sri Mohd Dzaidin Abdullah be retained until the end of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's case or will you appoint a judge who will bow to your needs as claimed by the Opposition?

PM: When appointed to court, he is free to pass judgments; the Government will not interfere. The judge makes judgments and passes death penalties and jail sentences even against members of the Government. There are those among my Cabinet who have

must abide by the law, even the Prime Minister. If he commits a crime, he will also be brought to court and punished in accordance with the law.

AJ: Who will take over if Datuk Seri resigns?

PM: In Malaysia, the Prime Minister is succeeded by the Deputy Prime Minister. The Deputy Prime Minister now is (Datuk Seri) Abdullah Badawi. He is my deputy. If I resign, he will take over my place.

AJ: Observers say you are always suspicious of those around you, your previous deputies and now Abdullah. We do not know whether he

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countries to do something to combat terrorism. What has the US asked of Malaysia?

PM: Actually, America has not demanded anything specific from us. Only after the Sept 11 attacks, they stressed that the world in general should unite against terrorism. We have agreed to campaign against terrorism. When I spoke to the President of the United States through the telephone, he thanked me for Malaysia's support in the campaign. We had also expressed our condolences to the victims of the attacks. They did not make any specific demands but we have made a decision to support the campaign against terrorism.

AJ: President Bush had given an ultimatum to President Pervez Musharraf that either Pakistan is with or against the US. What did Bush tell Datuk Seri?

PM: Bush did not say so to me even though I was expecting it.

AJ: What is the proof of Malaysia's support towards the US?

being left behind and for misinterpreting the religion. Was this to boost your own image and that of Malaysia in the eyes of the West?

PM: That's not true. This has been my stand for a long time, I do not make enemies of all *ulama*. Nevertheless, there are some *ulama* who have views that can adversely affect the development of the *ummah*. For example, there are those whose views are that we should only pursue religious knowledge and secular knowledge is not necessary as it has nothing to do with religion.

AJ: Shouldn't the Government be responsible for preventing *ulama* from going astray? The Government makes moves to be close to *ulama* who support the Government but distances itself or jails the true *ulama*.

PM: These *ulama* are not the authority. They are the political *ulama*. They have joined Opposition parties and those who do not represent their interests have been accused of being not knowledgeable.

AJ: As the leader of an Is-

countries.

PM: I think the American people's misunderstanding of the situation has caused their own Government to take this stand. US internal politics also influences its international politics.

AJ: The US has named two Islamic countries, Iraq and Iran, as the 'axis of evil'. What are your views on that? What is Malaysia's stand on Iraq which has been made an American target?

PM: We support efforts to eradicate terrorism but we did not support the attack against Afghanistan. I do not support attacks against any country. We are against violence and we won't go along with efforts to overthrow the Government of any country.

AJ: What is Malaysia's stand on America's attack against Iraq?

PM: I am not against a change in leadership but it must be for the good of the *ummah*, not an outside country.

AJ: Would America's methods in combating terrorism succeed?

PM: I feel their strategy is not correct. We tried to share our experience in combating terrorists. We identified the source and then fought to vanquish the source. I have stated that the source (of the problem) here is the Palestine issue. As long as this issue is not resolved, they will not be able to annihilate terrorists. We are sure many more will commit acts of terrorism

been sentenced by the court. The judge does not see whether the accused is in the Government or not. He is free to come to his own decision and we will not interfere. However, the Opposition views whatever they don't like as cruel.

AJ: So will Datuk Seri retain Dzaiddin's services?

PM: He has the right to remain until he is 56 years old. I will not be doing anything in this case. If he has reached retirement age, he can retire.

AJ: There are rumours that you secretly met Anwar in prison and that his release from prison was discussed while you both rode in a car. What actually happened?

PM: That story is without basis. Why should I explain, I am not at all involved in this matter. This is like a Hollywood film. I did not do such a thing.

AJ: Has it ever crossed Datuk Seri's mind to pardon Anwar on certain conditions?

PM: I cannot be involved in the court trial process. If he wants to be freed, it must be brought to court as only the court can decide who should be jailed or not, not me. I do not have the authority in this matter.

AJ: What about people waiting for Anwar to be pardoned?

PM: Many people have committed similar offences. If I can pardon, I should pardon all. In Malaysia, everyone

will be retained?

PM: I do not know why they have this view. (Tan Sri) Musa Hitam resigned. (Tun) Ghafar Baba and (Tengku) Razaleigh (Hamzah) have nothing to do with all this. Razaleigh tried to contest against me during party elections but failed and left the Cabinet. Ghafar was appointed after Musa Hitam. Anwar was appointed and resigned. I did not ask him to resign. He was my deputy but when I saw that he had committed immoral acts which cannot be accepted by society, I had no other choice but to get rid of him. Thereafter, he was hauled before the court and was punished. It was the court which decided, not me.

AJ: Datuk Seri, you have been expressing an intention to resign since 1997. Do you really want to resign?

PM: I do want to resign but in 1998, the economic crisis hit us. I wanted to resign now but I must ensure all internal matters are resolved. If I resign while there is a crisis or when the economy is not very good, it will appear as if I am running away from my responsibilities.

AJ: Will you be contesting in the 2004 general election?

PM: I have not decided.

AJ: When will you decide?

PM: When the time comes. I also need to get the views of the other *Ummno* members. If they want me to step down, I

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will do so. If they want me to stay, I will continue with my duties, I will heed the party's wishes.

AJ: There are claims that your cronies and family members have controlled the country's wealth.

PM: My family and cronies have nothing to do with the Government administration. Nevertheless, they are free to conduct business and pursue their own careers. They are not rich.

They are successful. The country has always given support to those in the business sector. Those who work hard will get the Government's support.

AJ: But there have been many allegations in Western media that your son Mirzan has amassed a fortune, the Government has given

him a loan of US\$409 million and he is also said to be involved in malpractices in Tabung Haji and in the purchase of shares in Petronas. Many quarters are talking about this.

PM: I would like to ask those spreading these news, is there any proof to substantiate them?

AJ: You say your family members have made business their career and some have been successful. But how about your son and relatives who have several business deals with 200 companies worth US\$5 billion?

PM: This is nonsense and I am prepared for my wealth to be audited, the same goes to those owned by my family.

AJ: Are you prepared to make a public declaration to dismiss all

allegations.

PM: I have informed my people that I do not have that kind of wealth.

AJ: You do not own the wealth but your children and relatives do.

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AJ: It has been said that Malaysia's success hinges on the Chinese whereas the Malays are lazy, unproductive and dependent on the

'My family and cronies have nothing to do with the Government administration. Nevertheless, they are free to conduct business and pursue their own careers. They are not rich. They are successful.'

PM: They have to provide proof to justify allegations that my children and relatives have billions. Making such a claim is easy but how about the proof. They do not have that much wealth; the Opposition is fond of discrediting the Government so that its image will be af-

Government.

PM: Yes, we have to admit that the Chinese have contributed much. The Malays have also contributed but they must change their attitude towards work and knowledge. We think the Malays have the same capabilities as the Chinese.

Government's support

AJ: Have the riots in Indonesia and the Philippines affected Malaysia's stability?

PM: In a certain context, it has. In Indonesia for instance, riots have caused their people to lose their livelihood and many have emigrated to Malaysia. Malaysia provides them many job opportunities but their numbers are too large and there are not enough jobs. This has given us problems.

AJ: Malaysia has suggested the introduction of an Islamic dinar in Islamic countries. Can this be realised?

PM: This is not a dream, it can be realised. An Islamic dinar is a gold dinar with its own value. We must use this dinar for overseas trade. When we conduct trade overseas, we should pay with the Islamic dinar. For those who want to use the dinar as gold, they can do so be-

cause gold has its own value unlike paper money.

AJ: What has other Islamic countries said about the proposal?

PM: Some have agreed with it. We want this to become reality. We have urged Islamic countries to discuss how this suggestion can be realised.

AJ: What are your ideas for the OIC (Organisation of the Islamic Conference)?

PM: We hope the conference next year will be able to come up with more concrete decisions to overcome the problems of Muslims worldwide, especially accusations that Muslims are terrorists, irresponsible, and unable to develop a country.

Suggestions on how to enhance the image of Islamic countries can also be forwarded.