

# We're **Islamic** **fundamentalist** state, says PM

STAR 18 JUN 2002

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia is not a moderate Islamic state but an Islamic fundamentalist state as its policy adheres to the fundamental teachings of Islam, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said he explained this to foreign leaders he met in the course of his recent visit to various Western countries.

"These leaders were shocked because they had long equated fundamentalism with terrorism," he told Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (BN - Bagan Datoh) in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said that about 15 years ago, the Western press, when reporting about him, said he was a fundamentalist and he was not ashamed when acknowledging himself as an Islamic fundamentalist.

He said Malaysia's policy was to abide by the fundamental teachings of Islam and when this was explained to the West, they agreed that the use of the word "fundamentalist" by them all this while had been inaccurate.

Dr Mahathir said he was glad he was able to explain this to several non-Muslim leaders as many of them did not know about this although many had shown interest in wanting to know more about Islam after the Sept 11 attacks last year.

He said if Muslims were to hold fast to the basic principles of the religion and not to "definitions by political ulamas", they would have no fear that they would deviate from Islam.

The Umno president chided the DAP for continuously harping for a definition on whether Malaysia was an "Islamic state or an Islamic country."

"The differences are not important. What's essential is that the world acknowledges Malaysia as an Islamic nation.

"I was invited to Vatican

City as a Muslim leader of an Islamic country.

"The world recognised Malaysia even before I made the announcement," he said, adding that this did not mean Malaysians of non-Islamic faith were being oppressed or that the Federal Constitution had to be amended."

Dr Mahathir also took a dig at PAS when the Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang (PAS - Marang) asked the Prime Minister whether his trip to the White House had changed his perceptions towards Israel.

He told the deputy PAS president and Terengganu Menteri Besar: "Please see that I have not changed colour. Even if I were to go to Terengganu, I won't become a PAS supporter. I am consistent, I'm still Dr Mahathir, so don't worry."

The Prime Minister pointed out that although there were more Muslims than Jews in the US, they (the Muslims) were split into different groups and had no common stand or opinion.

"On the other hand, the Jews have a common stand and the US tends to look towards those who have power to influence votes.

"That's why when (President George W.) Bush wanted to win the elections, he had to be careful towards the Jewish group," he said, adding that PAS should not criticise Bush when it (PAS) was carrying out the same practice.

Dr Mahathir said the United Nations is a "giant with feet made of clay" when it comes to dealing with Israeli aggression against the Palestinians.

The UN, he said, had passed several resolutions demanding that the Israelis halt their attacks against the Palestinians and to withdraw from occupied territories and set up a peacekeeping force in Jenin.

"Unfortunately, the UN is

like a giant with feet made of clay, with no stand of its own.

"It had wanted to send a peacekeeping force to Jenin but when Israel opposed this measure, its secretary-general Kofi Annan my friend said the team would not go.

"What is the purpose of the UN? Despite convening general assemblies and debates, it cannot do anything in the end.

"It can only depend on the superpowers to achieve anything. There is no justice, only that-might is right," he said, in a reply to Dr Tan Seng Giaw (DAP - Kepong).

To overcome the Middle East conflict, Dr Mahathir said "one must be even-handed and not be biased" towards either Israel or the Palestinians.

"I've spoken about it to the leaders in Europe and they agreed with me.

"We need to be fair to both sides. If either Israel or Palestinians were to commit acts of aggression, we must be prepared to condemn both," he said, adding that it was only through such means that the sources of terrorism could be wiped out.

Dr Mahathir said the conflict was basically one of territorial claims and that the Palestinians were merely fighting to retain land seized from them.

"However, they had managed to secure the sympathy of Muslims everywhere as most of them are Muslims.

"I am satisfied that my explanation was accepted by Pope John Paul II and other leaders.

"The Vatican was also uneasy with the way Israel has been carrying on with the Palestinians and they support Malaysia in our demands for negotiations of peace and for a peacekeeping force in the Middle East," he said.

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