

'Terrorism will end if justice returns'

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KUALA LUMPUR: Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday that although there are many causes of terrorism, the main factor is Israel and its violent occupation of Palestine land.

He warned the world that terrorism would not end until there is justice for the Palestinians.

Mahathir said it is sad that the situation in the Middle East has caused the rise of Islamic extremist groups and sadder still is the Western "panic" over terrorism.

"We are sure that the principal reason for terrorism by Muslims is their anger against Israel, the seizure of Palestinian land by Western powers in order to create the state of Israel," he said in his two hour address to the Umno General Assembly.

"If terrorism is to be stopped then the injustice and the oppression of Israel against Palestine and its people must be stopped quickly first."

Mahathir, 76, said faced with the unprecedented threat of terrorism after the Sept 11 attacks, "the big powers appear to have panicked and lost their direction".

"Unused to handling attacks by terrorists they resorted to conventional warfare."

Afghanistan was attacked, although the Sept 11 terrorists were not Afghans, and many innocent people, including women and children were killed, he said.

"But terrorism has not been stopped. The big powers continue to live in a state of

war because they believe that at any time the terrorists will attack again."

Defeating the Taliban rulers had not been effective in the fight against terrorism, Mahathir said.

"Actually the possibility of terror attacks has increased because Israel, which oppresses Palestine, used the war against terrorism to upgrade its terror attacks against the Palestinians."

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon fought terror with terror, but "even if the Israelis kill all the six million Palestinians" other Muslims and Arabs could take up the fight, he said.

"It is impossible for Israel to kill 1.3 billion Muslims in order to secure itself," he said, adding that it is up to the big powers to solve the Palestinian problem.

Mahathir said his declaration last year that Malaysia is an "Islamic state" was aimed at avoiding a split among Muslims in Malaysia.

Without naming PAS, Mahathir attacked the party for distorting the teachings of Islam. He quoted the Quran at length in defence of his own more moderate interpretation of the religion.

A key issue was PAS's plan to introduce the Islamic Syariah law next month in Te-

rengganu, which it controls. The law provides for the stoning to death for adultery and the amputation of limbs for theft.

Mahathir has said he will block the move if the federal government has the power to do so, and devoted several pages of his 27-page address to explaining why he believes PAS's programme is not truly Islamic.

Mahathir said not implementing hudud law does not mean Malaysia is not an Islamic country. He said the government does not reject the true hudud law but it must be in line with all the other teachings of Islam.