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Mahathir-Islam

UNITE TO CORRECT MISCONCEPTIONS ON ISLAM, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 28 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Islamic countries should close ranks in efforts to correct misconceptions that other parties have on Islam and to find solutions to all problems in the Islamic world.

The Prime Minister said Islam was now treated cruelly by the media because the Islamic community was not united and did not cooperate although they were rich and have plenty of capability.

"When we unite and cooperate, we can change the impression on Islam. We are capable of clarifying issues better and be together in settling every problem," he said.

He said this in a "live" interview with the Al-Jazeera television station in London which was aired early today.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia hoped that at the coming meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) to be held here, Islamic nations could reach agreement to come together and defend Islam and correct the misconception that Islam was synonymous with terrorism.

"We hope that the conference to be held next year can come up with a more concrete decision by Islamic countries to overcome the problems of Muslims throughout the world, particularly the allegations that Muslims are terrorists, are irresponsible and are not capable of developing a country," he said.

Dr Mahathir answered questions on various issues, including efforts to combat terrorism, the development of Islamic countries, the political scenario in Malaysia and the country's methods in tackling economic slowdown.

Asked whether the method used by the United States to fight terrorism would bear fruit, he said the strategy adopted was not right.

"I think the strategy is not right. We try to explain our experience in Malaysia when we tried to eradicate terrorism. We tried to identify the cause of terrorism and then to remove the cause.

"I have already stated that the cause is the Palestine issue. As long as this issue is not resolved, they will not be able to get rid of terrorists," he said.

He said many more would resort to acts of terror because they could no longer bear the calamity that happened, like what was happening in Palestine.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia supported efforts to combat terrorism but did not support the attack on Afghanistan in the United States' efforts to hunt down terrorists said to be responsible for the suicide attacks in New York and Washington last Sept 11.

Touching on the next general election, Dr Mahathir said he had not yet decided whether to contest or not.

Asked when a decision would be made, he said: "When the time comes. I also need to get the views of other (Umno) members. If they want me to withdraw, I will do so.

"And if they want to retain me, I will continue with my duty; I follow the wishes of the party."

-- BERNAMA

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