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`US-backed attacks amount to terrorism'

Hamisah Hamid

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday said US action in supporting Israeli aggression against the Palestinians amounts to terrorism.

He said the US calls for a fight against terrorists but, at the same time, the country is supporting the Israeli Government in the killings of Palestinian civilians.

Dr Mahathir said this ambiguity and double standards regarding terrorism should be replaced by a standard definition so that the world community can unite against terrorism.

"The US is doing right in terms of getting the world to act against terrorists, and I think the whole world would support.

"But unfortunately, the US has supported the action by the Israeli Government, which also amounts to terrorism," he told a news conference after opening the Special Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers on Terrorism in Seri Kembangan.

Muslim nations' anger with the Israeli aggression in Palestine and the role of the US in the bloody West Asia conflict is expected to take centre stage in the three-day conference.

The conference, which is participated by foreign ministers and their representatives from 52 countries of the 57-member Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), is held following the September 11 attacks in the US and the escalating Israel-Palestine violence.

The conference is expected to adopt a declaration containing, among others, definition of terrorism, its causes and forms of action to overcome it, at the end of the session tomorrow.

Dr Mahathir said there should only be one standard of terrorism for the whole world.

"I think some people have double standards; if it is an act of terrorism by their friends, it is excusable (but) if it is an act of terrorism by someone who they do not care for (and) they do not like, that is not excusable.

"That is the problem of double standards. We must have one standard and one action taken by the whole world," he said.

Dr Mahathir described terrorism as armed attacks or other forms of attacks against civilians, regardless if the attackers are acting on their own accord or on the orders of their Governments, and is irrespective of the justification of the operations carried out or the nobility of the struggle.

He said presently, the Israeli Government is escalating their terrorist acts as they are attacking civilians and Palestinian leaders without declaring a formal war.

"And this is the kind that we consider terrorism, and the world must condemn Israel for acts of terrorism.

"The fact that (it is) the Government that is acting, is not an excuse for the action they are taking against basically the civilians, the people of Palestine," he said.

Dr Mahathir also sees the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11 last year, the killing of Bosnian Muslims, the Japanese poisonous gas attacks as well as the killings of civilians by Palestinian suicide bombers and Tamil Tigers as acts of terror.

He said the Malaysian Government invites all Muslim nations to the

special conference on terrorism in order to reach an agreement on the definition of terrorism and actions to be taken.

"Of course, there will be some differences of opinions.

"In my view, minor differences should not prevent us from reaching an agreement on the essence of our view and the action that we should take," he said.

Asked whether the conference can achieve something concrete as Western countries, particularly the US, had not taken the United Nations (UN) resolution on Israeli aggression seriously, Dr Mahathir said although Muslim nations are weak, they can take action if they can speak with one voice.

"The one voice of the Muslim Ummah will have some effect, if not all the countries but one big number of countries.

"If we keep on the pressure with one voice, I'm quite sure even the US has to listen to the voice of their own allies in Europe and elsewhere," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that there is a greater sense of urgency for Muslim nations to come out with a concrete decision to fight terrorism from this conference due to the blatant acts of terrorism carried out by the Israelis against the Palestinians.

He said the UN should later organise an international conference on terrorism so that the global community would be committed to the resolution taken.

Earlier, in his keynote address, Dr Mahathir said the removal of grievances and causes of violent anger by certain people and governments can prevent new acts of terrorism.

He said there is a great deal of bitterness and anger among the deprived throughout the world today due to the disparities between the rich and poor as well as the strong and weak.

"These factors can lead to terrorism," he noted.

Dr Mahathir also said that the grievances against the Muslims are real and truly unbearable.

He highlighted the plight of Palestinians, who, for the last five decades, had their lands confiscated and were expelled by the Israelis from their own lands.

In the occupied land, the Palestinians were subjected to oppression and humiliation.

"Because they threw stones at the Israelis, they are shot at and killed, children included.

"For the Israelis, it is not an eye for an eye, it is a life for being hit by a stone," said Dr Mahathir, who regards the killings of the Palestinians as the "second holocaust".

During the holocaust, some 6 million Jews were said to be killed by Nazi Germans in concentration camps during World World II.

Meanwhile, the death toll of the Palestinians in the West Asian conflict is fast rising.

Between the start of the Palestinian Intifada (the uprising against Israeli occupation) 18 months ago and the middle of last month, the conflict has claimed 1,513 lives, including 1,168 Palestinians and 339 Israelis.

Dr Mahathir also told the conference participants about Malaysia's experience in facing terrorism from the Communist between 1948 and 1990.

He said while the Government hunted and punished them, it also looked into the causes of their insurrection.

After discovering that the Communist were mainly Chinese who felt alienated because they had not been given citizenship status by the British, the Malaysian Government had given more than a million

citizenship to the Chinese and provided them with protection, land and participation in the Government.

"This was what the Malaysian Government refers to as winning the hearts and minds of the people.

"They slowly ceased helping the terrorists, stopped the recruitment of new members and they actually helped the Government apprehend many of them," he said.

Dr Mahathir then urged the Muslims to show the world that terrorising people is not the way of Islam and they must strongly object the linking of Muslims with terror just because a few Muslims have resorted to acts of terror.

"We must point out that Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews and others are equally guilty of terrorism.

"Terrorists must be identified by their acts, and nothing else," he stressed.

The prime minister also reminded the Muslim nations that they have to be serious in clearing the image of Muslims which had been tarnished following the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington.

"Unless we are able to turn the present worldwide anger over the terrorist attacks of September 11 into a real campaign against all terrorists irrespective of their religious faiths, we are going to find that Muslim-bashing will be heightened and our struggle to alleviate the sufferings of hundreds of millions of oppressed Muslims will fail," he said.

Meanwhile, Dr Mahathir hosted a dinner for delegates of the conference at his official residence, Seri Perdana, in Putrajaya last night.

Present were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar and Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

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