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PM: Return to true teachings (HL)

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today urged Muslims, regardless of their political allegiance, to unite to make Malaysia a model Islamic nation in a world increasingly hostile to Islam.

In his Hari Raya Aidilfitri address, in which Dr Mahathir voiced his thoughts on Islam and terrorism, the Prime Minister called on Muslims to return to the true foundation and teachings of Islam.

"Together with non-Muslims, let us strive to maintain peace and develop this nation. Show the world that Islam is not a violent religion and Muslims are not terrorists.

"Show how we, Muslims who are the majority group in Malaysia, can be judicious to non-Muslims. Let us show them the true Islam, as true Muslims."

Dr Mahathir urged the militants here to repent and return to the true path and the community, and not be misled into doing what they would regret by fighting fellow Muslims.

He said it was ironic that these "Islamic militants" had not been willing to fight the colonial powers to establish an Islamic state, but surfaced after independence to fight their fellow Muslims.

He urged them not to allow arrogance to demean those who had fought for independence.

"Because of these extremists, Malaysia is now branded a terrorist centre. This has had a negative effect, and if they are not stopped, the country will suffer the same fate as certain other nations that were oppressed."

Dr Mahathir said the militants were a confused group who did not know what an Islamic nation was, and measured Islam in clothing, particularly women's clothing, and separation of the sexes.

"Women are not allowed to attend school or work to prevent them from becoming a temptation to men," he said.

"The militants' actions will only destroy the country, and the victims would be Muslims and an Islamic country."

"The battle in Malaysia is to preserve peace and prosper the nation in all areas, to strengthen our defence and frighten our enemies, as required by Islam."

Malaysia, he said, was more resilient than many Muslim nations, and efforts to subjugate it had failed.

He said those who wanted to create chaos here were traitors to the country and Islam, and it was regrettable that they wanted to seize power in their own country which already had a Muslim leadership, but did not want to battle enemies who oppressed Muslims.

He said these people went to Pakistan and Afghanistan purportedly to study religion but actually to learn how to make bombs, rob banks, to kill and to topple the Government to set up a supposedly Islamic nation.

"The world has recognised Malaysia as an Islamic nation, and this includes other Muslim countries which want to emulate us."

He said the militants exalt Afghanistan but the Taliban were conquered so easily by the West, leaving the country a beggar and taking orders from others.

"Is this the kind of Islamic country they want for Malaysia? The Afghans are not living happily, now or before. Many were forced to flee to other countries," he said. "How many Muslims have had to flee from Malaysia

because they were prevented from practising Islam?"

Dr Mahathir said fighting terrorism was not like fighting crime, and it would be sheer irresponsibility to allow terrorists to freely explode bombs before action was taken.

The terrorists in Malaysia, he said, were far more dangerous than the communists had been, and the country had to use preventive laws such as the Internal Security Act.

Acknowledging that several detainees had links to opposition parties, he refuted accusations that the Government was taking the opportunity to act against the Opposition.

He said it was an illogical conclusion as the detainees were previously unknown, while any plausible threat to the Government would come from the top leadership of opposition parties.

Dr Mahathir said respect for Muslims worldwide was at its lowest ebb; they were considered terrorists, and their nations dangerous.

The Muslim world had joined the rest in sympathising with the US after the Sept 11 attacks and pledging to fight terrorism, but this was fading because the war against terror had become one against Muslims, both friend and foe.

"Countries that had co-operated were also deemed as untrustworthy enemies, and visits to these countries were discouraged."

He said it may be excessive for an Islamic country to label the world's superpower the "Great Satan", but this was not too different from labelling Iraq, Iran and North Korea as the "Axis of Evil".

"We are not anti-West, or anti-the major powers, or anti-White. This is a statement of fact."

Hari Raya Aidilfitri, Dr Mahathir said, was an opportunity to demonstrate the true brotherhood of Muslims, and he urged Muslims to forgive one another and visit each other's homes.

"Do not forget to invite your non-Muslim friends to strengthen the bonds between us," he said, extending his gratitude and Hari Raya wishes to the security forces, civil servants and all Malaysians.

"As Prime Minister and a Muslim, and on behalf of my family, I wish Selamat Hari Raya Aidilfitri and maaf zahir batin to all Muslims."