

14/12/2002

`Treat root causes, terrorism will end'

Firdaus Abdullah

MUSLIM terrorism can be reduced or eliminated if the oppression of Muslims worldwide, the expropriation of their lands and the prevention of Muslims from seeking justice are addressed, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

The Prime Minister said that unless the true causes were recognised and addressed, Muslim anger would continue to fuel terrorist attacks.

"We can only foster peace and dialogue if we try to return to sanity and focus on the causes of terrorism instead.

"I believe that at the root of Muslim terrorism is the fact that they are weak and incapable of negotiating on equal terms with their detractors.

"Imposing the will of the powerful on Muslims is not dialogue for peace. Their Governments may be forced to agree, but not their people, some of whom will continue to fight in whatever way they can.

"The second need is for the recognition of the true causes. The expropriation of Muslim land and the oppression of Muslims."

"Since Sept 11 this oppression has become more widespread and more severe. If these two factors are acknowledged and negotiations are fairly conducted with the objective of removing the causes, God Willing, peace will ensue," Dr Mahathir said in his keynote address titled Islam-Fostering Peace and Dialogue In An Interdependent World at a Symposium on Islam held at the United Nations University here.

The symposium is jointly organised by the United Nations University, Ambassadors of Organisation of Islamic Conference members in Japan and supported by the Japanese Foreign Ministry and Japan Ruling Parties Parliamentary League for Islam.

Dr Mahathir told the audience that although Muslim Governments were not in complete control of the extremist elements in their countries, terrorism would die a natural death if the root causes were weeded out.

"It will not be immediate as in the case of the conventional defeat of a country. Muslim Governments are not in complete control of the extremist elements in their countries.

"But without a cause, the anger would diminish and there would be fewer recruits for terrorism. Eventually terrorism would cease for lack of support," he said, adding that a Third World War had been avoided for more than 50 years now due to treaties that were more rational and acceptable (after the Second World War) than the agreements reached after the First World War.

"But the powers that be have not learnt how to handle the war against terrorism. They treat it like a conventional war.

"They are doing everything possible to increase terrorism. Countries which collaborate are being threatened. The only thing that can happen is a loss of co-operation in the fight against terror. And terror attacks are going to be a part of our lives, whoever we may be.

"The world is set for a very long and painful war which will keep everyone in a state of fear, strangle world economy and render most of the advances in science and technology useless," he warned.

Dr Mahathir told the symposium that Islam spells peace but peace cannot be possibly attained until the true grievances of the Muslims were acknowledged and attended to.

Referring to the creation of the state of Israel, he said the Arabs were

discriminated against in order to solve the Jewish problem faced by the Europeans.

He pointed out that the Israel issue was one of the main reasons which fueled the anger of Muslims worldwide.

"The Arabs cannot see any reason why they should be made to pay debts owed by Europeans. And since then the Palestinian territorial issue has plagued the world, has caused misunderstandings and bitter confrontation between Arabs, Europeans and Jews which most people attribute to differences of religion.

"There is obvious confusion between religious confrontations and territorial expropriation.

"There is of course some element of religion involved but the main issue is land expropriation and oppression which met with resistance. Today it is nothing more than a wish for retaliation and revenge," he added.