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PM: Revenge not the answer (HL)

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PANGKOR, Sun. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said there would be no end to Muslim terrorism if the powerful nations were bent on revenge rather than solutions.

"They have made no effort to win the hearts and minds of Muslims, but have done everything to alienate and frustrate them."

This in turn, he said, would fuel the anger of Muslims, ensuring a constant supply of recruits to terrorism.

"The West does not care to find out the causes of terrorism and to remove them. The faint voices protesting from among them are ignored," he said, adding that the costly war would not end because the West refused to acknowledge that short of total genocide, terrorists could not be militarily defeated.

Borrowing a phrase from Harvard Professor Samuel P. Huntington, he described the drawn-out war against terrorism as a clash of Western and Islamic civilisations.

"Huntington's forecast has come true. There is now a clash of civilisations, that of the West against the Islamic civilisation.

"And typically, the Western solution is to physically fight against the enemy, the Islamic civilisation, the Muslims," he said in a strong closing address to the weekend-long Pangkor Retreat which had been dominated by a war of words in support of and condemning the United States' unilateral stance on terrorism.

Huntington had authored *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order* in 1993, to put forward his much-criticised hypothesis that the next source of conflict in the world would be cultural, not ideological and economic.

"The fault lines between civilisations," he said, "would be the battle lines of the future."

His theory remains controversial but has been increasingly cited following the Sept 11 terrorist attacks on the US.

"The world," Dr Mahathir said, "regarded all Muslims as potential terrorists. Even Malaysians were penalised and could not get visas, are thoroughly checked and humiliated when they go to certain countries."

The Prime Minister said Muslims everywhere were made to feel oppressed, angry, bitter and frustrated, yet they could not react by going to war in the conventional way because they were weak.

"The only way they could hit back was to retaliate through acts of terror, hitting out blindly at the innocent as well as the guilty."

Dr Mahathir said terrorism was a result of frustration, anger and bitterness in a world that tolerated oppression and injustice.

"People, innocent people, are being deliberately starved through sanctions imposed by the very rich, the overfed and most wasteful of consumers," he said, citing the examples of Pakistan, Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo, Sudan, Libya, Iran, Iraq and Chechnya.

"The world was given only one choice - accept Western culture, values and systems, and liberal democracy."

Dr Mahathir reiterated that the only way to fight terrorism was to find a solution to its causes.

The answer, he said, did not lie in confrontation, force or a war to end all wars, but in justice and fair play, sensitivity and a willingness to admit mistakes, and in banishing the idea that any one race had a monopoly

of the right values, systems and solutions to all human ailments.

"Democracy, human rights and all other rights have caused as much turmoil, injustice and damage as autocracy.

"The arrogance of power must be eliminated," he said, to loud applause from about 200 international and local eminent persons attending the retreat at the Pangkor Laut Resort.

The retreat, or Asian Global Leadership Forum, was organised by Forbes Inc, YTL Corporation Berhad, CNBC and the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute.

In the dialogue later, he was asked if Malaysia, as a moderate Muslim voice, would offer to act as a peacemaker between the Western powers and Iraq, as it did successfully in Myanmar.

Dr Mahathir said this was something too big for Malaysia, and it did not believe that it would be able to handle it.

He said he only wanted to stress that there should not be further provocation against the Muslim world.

"Many of the Middle-Eastern countries which supported the US in the 1990 Gulf War, and which are no friends of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, do not support the US today because they fear further aggravation of a tense situation.

"The US and Britain must listen to the voices of the world, including the Muslim countries," he said.

To another question on political ideologies, he said the lack of competition in an unipolar world was not conducive for peace.

"Previously, the two major superpowers would compete to be nice to other countries to win allies, but today it's take it or else."

He joked that the global village needed more than one bully, so that they could keep each other in check.