

PM: Hard to get Muslims to unite

Star 12/10/03

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia is not "too ambitious" about the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) because it knows how difficult it is to get the 50 over countries and for the 1.3 billion Muslims worldwide to unite, said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The Prime Minister however said he felt "we can persuade perhaps a number of them to unite to act effectively despite the fact that there is no full unity."

"We are not too ambitious. We think we should have a different strategy which can give us better results. That is what we hope for in the OIC," he said in an interview on BBC's *Talking Point* programme hosted by Lyse Doucet.

Malaysia is currently chairing the OIC summit.

Dr Mahathir said violence and killing achieved nothing in the 50 years in Palestine and only escalated more attacks against Muslims.

"There is no victory in this, no light at the end of the tunnel. That is not the right way. There must be other ways," he said.

The Palestine and Iraq issues would be a focus point of discussions in this week's OIC meetings and summit in Putrajaya.

To a question from Iraq on why Muslim countries did not stop Saddam Hussein from committing crimes against his people, Dr Mahathir said the fact was

leaders in many countries committed crimes against their people and the whole world remained silent.

He cited as an example lots of such cases in Africa where more than five million people were killed but "nobody does anything about this".

"Saddam is a dictator and all that but there are dictators everywhere.

"If you take action, take action against everybody. Why pick on Iraq?" he said, adding that he believed there was an agenda behind the US attack there.

Dr Mahathir pointed out that Iraqis were now shooting Americans and did not see them as their liberators.

The situation was different in the Second World War, he said, when US troops in Paris were greeted by kisses from all the girls.

"We don't see that happening in Iraq," he added.

He however admitted that it was not easy to be critical of atrocities within Muslim countries when "you yourself are subject to be attacked by the West."

He noted that some critical of Malaysia said the country was ruled by a dictator called Mahathir and even equated him with Saddam.

"This kind of distorted vision of the world is what is creating problems in the country," he said.

On whether Muslim countries should possess nuclear weapons, Dr

Mahathir said no country should have them regardless of whether it was a good, bad, powerful or weak country because they were an inhuman way of killing people to achieve political ends.

He did not agree with continuous development of weapons which cost more and more when money could be better spent in helping people rather than improving the efficiency to kill.

"As far as I am concerned, that is very primitive," he said.

On the Myanmar military junta's continued detention of pro democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, Dr Mahathir said releasing her would not be a bad thing but "we have to progress slowly and we have to persuade them to do what we think is right."

He said expelling Myanmar from Asean was only a last resort because if the grouping did that, it would lose all contact with the Myanmar Government and could do nothing more to try and find a situation out.

Therefore, he said Asean should appreciate the "little progress" that its Government had made and give them the chance to manage their own country.

Dr Mahathir added that some people thought democracy was a medicine that could cure all ills but this was not always so as it could create more trouble and cause anarchy.