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Don't look back in anger, Jews told

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad reminded the Jews that they should not treat Muslims the way they were treated, persecuted and massacred by other races.

He said when the Jews were persecuted and there was a plan to wipe them out during the Holocaust, they sought refuge in Muslim countries like Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and even Egypt, and they were not ill-treated in those countries.

"We sympathised with them. We were sad to see how the Jews were ill-treated by the Europeans," Dr Mahathir said after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting.

The retiring Prime Minister was asked if he had any parting advice for the Jews.

Dr Mahathir, accused of being anti-Semitic by Western leaders for his speech during the opening of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference Summit in Putrajaya earlier this month, said the Jews must not think they were the chosen people who were above criticism.

"Supposing part of Britain or America is taken by Jews as part of Israel. Do you think the Americans will sit quietly and say 'OK, welcome?' They won't.

"When the Palestinians were expelled from their country and their land given to the Jews, it's not religion at all, it's territorial. If you take somebody's land, they will fight for it," he added.

On another issue, Dr Mahathir said although the country needed an Opposition to act as a check-and-balance to the ruling Government, it should not go overboard in its bid to win support.

He said the Opposition should be truthful and not spread lies and make defamatory statements against the country and the Barisan Nasional Government.

"I hope that Pas accepts that Umno is also a party which holds true to Islamic teachings and that there is no difference between the religious beliefs of both parties.

"There may be political differences, but not religious. We are all of the same religion," he said.

For non-Islamic Opposition parties, Dr Mahathir said their leaders should not spread lies about the Government abroad.

"They should appreciate the Government and not belittle it. No one should be hurling lies and defaming the Government," he added.

In other countries, he said the Opposition would work with the Government once an election was over.

"Though during campaigning they may be against each other, once the election is over, they will work together.

"However, in Malaysia, the Opposition continues to criticise the Government even after an election is over."

He said sometimes government leaders spent plenty of time, even in coffee shops, talking about politics, trying to rebut these lies and rumours and this was a waste of time.

To a question whether the Government had succeeded in overcoming racial barriers in the country, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had done better than most other countries.

"In most other multi-racial countries, there are barriers, but in Malaysia, there is co-operation among all the races.

"We have done very well. We have 14 component parties in the Barisan Nasional representing all the races and tribes in the country," he said.

He said whenever there was an issue, the parties would, in the spirit of BN, discuss and iron out things among themselves.

Asked on a report in Harakah that Pas leaders would lodge police reports nationwide against Dr Mahathir for alleged crimes he committed during his tenure, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said: "We will definitely continue to defend our leader."

Dr Mahathir then quipped: "They can take me to court if I have done wrong."