

20/08/2003

Dr M defines what an act of terror is

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THE killing of innocent civilians must be considered an act of terror but, in some cases, there are mitigating circumstances, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said on Monday.

Speaking at a dialogue with ulamas and Islamic scholars of Syria, he said it cannot be right to kill people because of anger or frustration.

"We are angry and very frustrated now, people are oppressing us but we cannot do anything against them. But to kill people who are innocent because of our anger is not right. At least to me, I don't think it is right. To kill people, not even the person who hit us, is wrong. We must admit that it is wrong," he said to a question on his definition of terrorism.

He said killing must be avoided as far as possible.

However, he noted that in some cases such as in Palestine and those fighting for independence, there are mitigating circumstances because these people have no other choice.

"They may do things that appear to be acts of terror but in fact, there is no way out for them. That is the only way they can fight because they are less well-armed than their enemies," he said.

The Israeli government, however, has no excuse as they have other means to defend themselves and need not carry out acts of terror.

"The Israeli government has a choice, the Americans have a choice not to terrorise people by bombing civilians, hospitals etc. But they do that, so that is an act of terror that cannot be excused."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had convened an international conference in an attempt to define terrorism but could not reach an agreement.

The luncheon dialogue was chaired by Mohamad Ziadah, Minister of Endowments.

Asked about his controversial opinion on the Jewish role in the Asian financial crisis of 1997, he explained his reasoning on how the Jews had obtained a strong grip on the American government, banking system and media.

"(Being) the biggest power in America they control the world and economy. Their ideas about currency trading resulted in the attack on Malaysia.

"They said they want to make money; it's not because they are Jews. But whether they want to make money or not, the fact is that they are Jews and what they have done, benefits the Jews."

To questions on Muslim unity, Dr Mahathir said there were now so many interpretations of Islam including those meant solely to serve political ends. This has resulted in confusion among the Muslims and disunity. He also said Muslims have neglected the fundamental requirement of Islam to gain knowledge.

"We neglected what is fundamental to Islam and instead, we focus on issues that do not contribute to the development of the Muslim ummah. We are more interested in minor differences in the interpretations of Islam."

He said the scholars should come together and try and reach a consensus on the true teachings of Islam.