

24/01/2003

PM: Condemn terrorism

Hardev Kaur

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Muslims should condemn terrorism because it was against their religion's teachings.

But in the case of Palestinians, "we find it difficult to condemn them because we are not in a position to go to war against Israel or other oppressors and the Palestinians are left to fight for themselves. They have no choice but to act the way they are acting."

In an interview with the inaugural issue of "Global Agenda", he said Muslims thought they were mistreated and "this impression is gaining rather than diminishing".

"This is because since Sept 11 (Israeli Prime Minister) Ariel Sharon has gone all out to counter-terrorise terrorists, to increase acts of terror against the Palestinians".

Dr Mahathir said the root cause of Sept 11 was the impression by Muslims that they were being oppressed, particularly in Palestine.

"Whether it is correct or incorrect is irrelevant because it is their impression. And they feel that Palestinians have been treated very unfairly".

Sept 11 was "fortuitous" - a lot of people think that because of Sept 11, other countries have begun to understand why Malaysia has to be tough on violent opposition.

"Other countries are now taking the same measures. They are forced to accept that under certain circumstances they, too, must act in the same way that Malaysia acts".

"Maybe Sept 11 was fortuitous, but Malaysia did not depend on Sept 11 at all. We would have taken action even if the world were to condemn us".

On his definition of "good governance", Dr Mahathir said the most important thing was to do things that were good for the people.

He said sometimes the stress was too much on how things were done - whether they conform to the current styles, current ideas or not.

But the most important thing is the results, he added.

"That is far more important than being dogmatic about certain ideologies. I am not dogmatic ... which is why Malaysia has five-year plans."

Dr Mahathir said he had no regrets after leading the country for more than 21 years but at times felt frustrated "because I cannot change the mindset of my own people, the indigenous people of Malaysia".

The Prime Minister said he was most proud of the success in maintaining relative racial harmony.

He however added that racial harmony was the result of the first Prime Minister. "I have been able to continue with that. That is a very tough thing".

Asked whether he was concerned that he had "become a crutch for Malaysians", who perhaps worry that they will not be able to carry on without him, Dr Mahathir replied "I don't think I'm a crutch".

"I know I admonish a lot of people whenever they fail or they don't come up to my expectations. I say nasty words to people, so I don't think they can depend on me as a crutch very much".

As for the New Economic Policy, he said it would continue to be in place but "we will seek ways to make it more effective". While the policy had not achieved its targeted objectives, it did not mean that affirmative action was wrong.

"It is the right thing as long as one accepts that some people are bound to become complacent because they are being discriminated in favour of others. Unfortunately, the numbers who are complacent far outnumber those who have made progress".

Dr Mahathir told the magazine that without the affirmative action, the situation in the country would have been worse.

He pointed out that there were no racial riots during the financial crisis of 1997-1998 as the policy had partially corrected the imbalance between the races.

Since the objective had not been achieved, termination of the policy now might worsen the situation and might cause instability.

He expressed confidence that the day would come when the "indigenous people are capable of competing with the other races". Then "it (the affirmative plan) will disappear".

Other issues touched in the interview included his plans when he retires later this year, Malaysia-Singapore relations, Asean, democracy, Vision 2020 and capital controls.

Dr Mahathir will speak at the opening of the annual World Economic Forum here today. He is expected to speak on "Trust and Governance for a New Era".

He will also participate in discussions on "Political Islam and its discontents" and "How the fight against terrorism will change the world".