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PM: US afraid of its shadow (HL)

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KOTA KINABALU, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the United States was afraid of its own shadow after having subjected many people to its brutality.

"Having bombed and killed people, they now feel frightened that people might kill them, so they are afraid to go anywhere," he said, adding that although Malaysia was absolutely safe, they dared not come here.

Dr Mahathir said the US was a much more dangerous place than Malaysia.

"I would like to remind them that the attack on the World Trade Centre was in America and not here, so America is a much more dangerous place than Malaysia," he said.

The Prime Minister was reacting to a US warning that terrorists affiliated to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network might be planning attacks on US citizens and interests in Malaysia.

In its travel advisory, the US State Department claimed that the threat was particularly high in Sabah where the banned Jemaah Islamiyah group, which is linked to the al-Qaeda, has been active.

The advisory stated that citizens travelling to the islands and coastal areas of eastern Sabah have to be aware of the threats from the Abu Sayyaf group in the southern Philippines, and should exercise extreme caution.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at the Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRS) eighth congress at the community centre in Keningau, at the ground-breaking ceremony for the Sabah Umno building here and later at a Press conference at the Kota Kinabalu airport before leaving for Kuala Lumpur.

He said the Americans were afraid that people might kill them because they had brutalised so many people. Asked if he would suggest that the US stop issuing such advisories, Dr Mahathir said: "It is not for me to advise them."

Dr Mahathir said the US had been cruel to people in some parts of the world, and they were now afraid that those they had been cruel to would attack them.

"They are afraid because they know a lot of people worldwide hate them. We do not hate them in Malaysia, but yet they do not want their people to come to this country," he said.

He also spoke of how superpowers such as the US and Britain discriminated against others, causing children, the elderly and the sick to get killed.

"Children as young as Yasmine Wa'adi (of Iraq) have been killed. She was lucky to have only lost her legs, other children died.

"These criminal acts will cause them to live in fear for as long as they do not take steps to rectify things," he said.

While admitting that terrorist attacks could happen anywhere, Dr Mahathir said Americans should feel safe in Malaysia as it had strong and reliable security forces.

"In Malaysia, leaders can go wherever they like, including to large gatherings, without fear that someone will blow up a bomb. I can personally go to shopping complexes and meet the people," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this was because the Government was not cruel to its people. He said the Government, which was elected by the people, had worked hard to ensure there were education, employment and health opportunities for Malaysians.

"We have not discriminated against the people. That is why we are living

in peace, despite being a multiracial country.

"In Malaysia, there is no race which is cruel to another race. We treat everyone equally. The Barisan Nasional Government has been fair by providing opportunities to all races," he said.

Dr Mahathir said there could be a hidden motive behind the repeated warnings by the US of possible terrorists attacks in Malaysia.

He said the US would accuse Malaysia of not ensuring security to foreigners in the country and use it as an excuse "to do something about Malaysia", such as trying to change the Government.

Citing the US-led invasion of Iraq as an example, he said the US had accused Iraq of having weapons of mass destruction but after they had invaded the country, such weapons were not found. Dr Mahathir said the allegation that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction was only an excuse to invade the country.

Echoing Dr Mahathir, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said in Kuala Terengganu the US travel advisory was baseless. Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, said the US still did not understand the measures taken by the Government to check and act against terrorism.