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World must change way of tackling problems, says PM

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Despite progress in various fields, the world community has failed to learn how to cope and manage itself because it still thinks that might is right, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the world must change its perception of things and way of dealing with problems before it could claim that it had established a modern, more humane and sophisticated civilisation.

He said the situation in Iraq, Palestine, North Korea and many other hot spots showed it was still a world where the strong dominate and the weak must submit.

"Frankly, I do not think we have progressed much from the Stone Age. They used clubs and we use nuclear weapons, but the premise is still the same."

Opening the 11th Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum at a hotel here, Dr Mahathir said: "We still think in terms of the capacity to kill as the determinant of our strength."

He said it was time for the world "to pause and think".

"Labelling people as 'Satan' or 'Axis of Evil' merely provokes but does not resolve anything. Oppressing people or destroying their countries will not solve problems either.

"We have to get away from our old culture and values and reinvent our civilisation. The globalised world needs a change in our perception of things and in our way of dealing with problems that must arise with change."

The three-day gathering is attended by about 150 delegates from 27 member nations.

The APPF is a non-exclusive forum of international parliamentarians founded by former Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone in 1991.

Malaysia's delegation is headed by Bagan Datoh Member of Parliament Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

Citing North Korea as an example of the world's wrong handling of the situation, Dr Mahathir said despite that country admitting that it had nuclear capability, it was not being threatened with war as was the case with Iraq.

"We do not want to see North Korea being threatened with war and the country being militarily attacked, but the accommodating attitude is going to anger the Muslims more. Yet when North Korea agreed to co-operate and end its nuclear programme, it has not been appreciated.

"There was no relaxation of the condemnation of North Korea nor was food and other aid given. Justified or not, the country feels it had been let down.

"Hence, the more uncooperative and belligerent attitude that it has adopted recently."

North Korea had never been an easy country to deal with, but whether it joined the world community or not, Dr Mahathir said, it was still part of the global village.

"We have to learn how to befriend it and get its co-operation. Cutting off supplies of food and other necessities will not bring it to its knees. Perhaps we can nuclear-bomb it out of existence, but that would be a confession of our failure."

Dr Mahathir said one could not live in isolation any more, adding that

globalisation was not about trade and investments only.

"We must also accept that nothing happens in one part of the world without affecting the rest. The attack on the World Trade Center (on Sept 11, 2001) is not an attack on the United States alone. It is an attack on the whole world."

By the same token, the dispossession of Palestinian land was not an exclusive problem of the Palestinians as terror had become as globalised as trade and investments. The terrorism that assailed the world today, he said, had a direct connection with the fate of the Palestinians.

Therefore, the Prime Minister said, the law and policy-makers of the world could not limit their interest to their countries alone.

"They have to be interested in the whole world. That is why it is useful for them to come together and discuss their national problem as international issues, as problems that affect the whole world."

Touching on the fight against global terrorism, Dr Mahathir pointed out that the menace "has always been with us" but the world was not moved to wage a war on terrorists because the people that had been terrorised such as Chechens, Kashmiris, Rwandans, Chileans and others were ordinary citizens of inconsequential countries.

But everything changed, he said, "when New York, the business capital of the richest and most powerful nation of the world, was attacked. Everyone realised that no one was safe".

Unfortunately, Dr Mahathir said, the world had never handled global terrorism before.

"We think in terms of conventional warfare. We think if we can defeat them militarily, they would surrender and sue for peace," he said, adding that the approach led to billions spent on upgrading defence and security instead of acknowledging and addressing the causes leading to the acts of terror.

Referring to the Middle East conflict, he said the Israelis should know by now that defence and security measures had not stopped suicide bombers.

"The world is far less thorough in defence and security than the Israelis. It stands to reason that the world fight against terror through upgrading defence and security is going to be far less successful than the Israelis.

Instead of trying to remove the causes of terrorism, the principal reason for which was territorial and not religious, the Prime Minister felt that the world was merely aggravating the situation such as when they ignored the struggle of the Palestinians to regain their land.

He said there was a time when Muslim countries were in agreement on the need to stop Iraqi aggressiveness, but today that unity of purpose had disappeared with Muslims viewing the stance against Iraq as another act of discrimination against the community.