

PM touts moderation at UN while Shiites at home suffer
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In the face of conflict between the Sunni and Shiite in the Muslim world, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has sought to play the voice of reason, urging moderation in his speech to the United Nations last night.

However, the message does not appear to resonate back at home, as around the same time, the Pahang Islamic Religious Department has arrested an imam for allegedly practising Shiism.

NONEA member of Najib's administration, Minister in the Prime Minister Jamil Khir Baharom has also consistently defended the government's ban on Shiite Islam and dismissed criticism that the government's move violates human rights.

The vast majority of Muslims in Malaysia including religious institutions follow the Sunni sect.

Meanwhile according to a Bernama report, Najib said the conflict between Sunni and Shiite Muslim threatened the lives and livelihoods of millions of Muslims, and Islam, founded on peace, and premised on tolerance, was allegedly being twisted by extremists, who were deploying false arguments to foster division and justify violence.

Najib said across the Islamic world, extremists were wrapping their perverse agenda in religious cloth; tearing families, countries and the ummah apart.

"With each new atrocity, tensions are wound tighter, and peace seems further away.

"The corrosive influence of extremism cannot be easily countered. But we are not powerless to act. I believe moderation in religion and the political process can stem the loss of life and liberty in the Muslim world.

"Behind the tragic violence, there is a battle being waged for the future of Islam. By reaffirming our commitment to moderation – and solving the political problems that drive instability – we can seize back the centre ground. We can marginalise the extremists. And we can advance an agenda for peace, harmony and justice," he said.

He said the concept of balance and moderation, of social justice "within our faith" was a central tenet of Islam, and it asked Muslims to hold to the principles displayed by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in the Medina Charter.

Reject extremism, says Najib

Najib urged peace-loving Muslims, the overwhelming majority of Muslims, to unite against extremists who use religion as an excuse to commit violence.

najib hari raya open house pc 080813 05He said around the world, Muslims have watched in despair as conflict tore into some of their oldest communities, and rarely in their history had the ummah (faithful) faced violence on this scale.

Najib, who made this call in his national statement at the general debate of the 68th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) at its headquarters on Saturday, said much had changed since he made a proposal at UNGA here three years ago (2010) for a Global Movement of Moderates to reject extremism in all its forms.

The prime minister said the real divide was not between East and West or between the developed and developing worlds or between Muslims, Christians and Jews, but was between moderates and extremists of all religions.

He said killings (by Islamic extremists) was a burden the Muslims the world over could no longer afford to bear, and it was time to end such killings, and concentrate instead on building a common agenda for peace and prosperity by using one of the most powerful tools to do so, "al-wasatiyyah", the practice of moderation.

Najib said a current of protest and reform surged through the Middle East and North Africa, and out of the heat of the Arab Spring, new questions arose about the pace of democratic change, about the role of Islam in politics, and about the need for more inclusive development.

"But the search for answers to those questions has been put on hold," he said.

He said authoritarian regimes had fallen, governments had been swept away by political change, extremists had tried to fill the space that remains.

"Motivated by ideology, politics and religion, they have sought refuge from the hard work of development in the unholy practice of violence," he added.

Muslim threat 'from within'

Najib said conflicts had spilled across borders, inflaming old tensions, and igniting new ones and around the world, extremism was taking lives and crushing opportunity.

"This affects us all; but it is one people, of one faith, who suffer most. I believe the greatest threat to Muslims today comes not from the outside world, but from within," he said.

Najib said the task of Muslims was to reclaim their faith, by articulating clearly the true nature of Islam: the religion of peace, of moderation, of tolerance.

"We should speak this message clearly, so that all may hear it; and stand firm against the minority who use Islam to further violent and unjust ends," he said.

He said people should not mistake moderation for weakness and to face those baying for violence and call instead for calm was a sign not of frailty, but of strength.

Najib also called on Muslim leaders to speak up and condemn such violence if they did not want their silence to be mistaken for acceptance.

He said moderation could be practised at the national level, as was the case in Malaysia, by choosing mutual respect and inclusivity, and strengthening the bonds between different communities and faiths.

"All countries should reinforce their commitment to the principles of moderation; not just in religion, but for sustainable development and stable economic growth," he said.

Najib said moderation could also direct regional policy as it sat at the heart of Malaysia's efforts to bring peace to the southern Philippines, and to Thailand's restive south.

He said Asean, which endorsed the Global Movement of Moderates, had made a commitment to peaceful settlement and the non use of force in territorial disputes.

"And at the international level, moderation could guide our approach to the great global challenges of our age: violent extremism, sustainable development, and equitable growth," he added.

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