

7 Dr M against violence

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PUTRAJAYA: Muslims all over the world can express their feelings over comments by Pope Benedict XVI but they should refrain from violent protests.

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said: "You can give comments but do not be physical about it ... not to the point of burning embassies or do things like that."

The former prime minister was replying to a question on whether Muslims' anger towards the pontiff who had apologised over his remarks made in Germany was justified.

Dr Mahathir also said the Vatican should do more to improve relations with the Muslim community.

After the apology, the pope told the faithfuls in St Peter's Square recently that he had deep respect for Islam and hoped the remarks he made could lead to dialogue among religions.

The pope acknowledged his remarks were open to misinterpretation, but insisted he had not intended to endorse a negative view of Islam.

In a Sept 12 address in Germany,

Pope Benedict cited the words of a Byzantine emperor who characterised some of the teachings of Prophet Muhammad as "evil and inhuman", particularly "his command to spread by the sword the faith".

On Sunday, Pope Benedict said he was "deeply sorry" about the reaction to his remarks, stressing that they did not reflect his own opinion. Some Muslim leaders accepted his regrets, although others demanded an unequivocal apology.

The uproar across the Muslim world led to protests in several countries. Churches were attacked in the West Bank, an effigy of the pope was burned in Iraq and a nun was shot dead in Somalia in an attack believed linked to the controversy.

Meanwhile, Pope Benedict would meet ambassadors of Muslim countries to the Vatican and the leaders of the Muslim community in Italy on Monday, the Ansa news agency said.

The meeting is to take place at Castel Gandolfo, the pope's residence outside of Rome.