

Pope personally says 'sorry' for offending Muslims

ROME: Pope Benedict XVI said yesterday that he was "deeply sorry" for the outrage triggered across the Muslim world by remarks he made about Islam and stressed they had not reflected his personal opinion.

Under mounting pressure from Muslim leaders to offer a personal apology, the head of the Roman Catholic Church stopped short of retracting his remarks made in Germany last week in which he quoted an obscure medieval text that criticised some teachings of the Prophet Mohammed as "evil and inhuman".

"I am deeply sorry for the reactions in some countries to a few passages of my address... which were considered offensive to the sensibility of Muslims," the pope said.

He stressed that the passages he quoted during a speech at Regensburg University last Tuesday "do not in any way express my personal thought".

"I hope that this serves to appease hearts and to clarify the true meaning of my address, which in its totality was and is an invitation to frank

Malaysia insists on a 'full apology'

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HAVANA: Malaysia yesterday regretted that Pope Benedict XVI failed to offer a full apology and retract derogatory remarks about Islam in a speech he made, which enraged Muslims around the world.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the pope only stated he was "deeply sorry" about the reaction but made no effort to calm Muslim anger by making a full apology.

and sincere dialogue, with great mutual respect."

His expression of sorrow yesterday was stronger than that of "sincere regret" contained in a Vatican statement the day before, but it remained to be seen if it would satisfy Muslim demands for an unequivocal personal apology.

The Italian interior ministry told police chiefs to raise the level of national security yes-

The pope had on Tuesday cited from a medieval text about holy wars that described Islam as "evil and inhuman" in a speech in Germany.

"Muslims have all this while felt oppressed and the statement by the pope saying he is sorry about the angry reaction is inadequate to calm the anger, more so because he is the highest leader of the Vatican," Syed Hamid told Malaysian journalists here at

terday amid violent threats by Islamist groups overseas.

A third day of attacks on Christian places of worship in the Palestinian territories saw assailants throw Molotov cocktails at two Catholic churches in the northern West Bank.

The pope said the "true meaning" of what he said in Germany had been clarified by the Vatican's Secretary of

the end of the Non-Aligned Movement summit.

Because of that, he said, Malaysia would continue to insist that the pope give a full apology and retract his statement.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is also the chairman of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, had earlier called on Pope Benedict to apologise and retract his statement. — Bernama.

State Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone on Saturday.

Bertone said the pope's words had been misinterpreted and were meant as a rejection of the religious motivation for violence, "from whatever side it may come".

That explanation had been angrily dismissed by many Muslim groups who pressed on with demands for a full and personal apology.

"The pope made a mistake, he must recognise his mistake and apologise," said Abdel Moneim Abul Futuh, a senior official with Egypt's opposition Muslim Brotherhood.

The scale and intensity of the Muslim reaction had cast doubts on the pope's next scheduled foreign trip in November to Turkey.

However, Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul said yesterday the visit would go ahead as planned.

"A change is out of the question for us right now," he said.

In Mogadishu, the killing of an Italian Catholic nun yesterday may well be linked to anger among Muslims about the pope's remarks, a senior source among Somalia's Islamists said.

"There is a very high possibility the people who killed her were angered by the pope's recent comments against Islam," said the source.

Gunmen shot and killed the nun, who worked at a children's hospital in north Mogadishu, and her bodyguard. — Agencies