



FT INTERVIEW ABDULLAH BADAWI

‘Fight roots of terror, not the symptoms’

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Quentin Peel interviews the Malaysian prime minister, who says Muslim opinion has been radicalised by Iraq and the Palestinian issue

Moderate Muslim countries face a greater threat from terrorism than western countries, but all nations must urgently address the causes of that terrorism instead of concentrating on the symptoms, according to Abdullah Badawi, prime minister of Malaysia.

World Muslim opinion had been radicalised by western policies in the Middle East, including the failure to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, and the invasion of Iraq.

“Trying to resolve terrorism without examining its root causes is like trying to fertilise the fruits and not the roots,” he said.

Speaking as the leader of one of the most moderate Muslim countries, and as chairman of the 57-nation Organisation of the Islamic Conference, Mr Abdullah warned that governments in the Islamic world were being undermined by their failure to influence the US and the United Nations in enforcing resolutions calling for an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian land.

“Is this an Islamic issue?” he asked. “No. It is an issue of the people, of Muslims, non-Muslims, Christians and Jews, who have a right to return to the homeland

when people have been expelled. So we have to help them.”

Yet the fact that UN resolutions on Israel were ignored stirred up a backlash against Muslim governments, not simply in the Middle East but across Asia.

“They want to react because [they think] their government is not reacting,” he said. “That is the whole trouble. [They say]: ‘You are not an Islamic government, so you have no feeling for

lim radicals who demand that their governments should adopt an overtly Islamic label.”

“Many Muslims aspire to set up an Islamic government,” he said. “I don’t think that Islam is the only way to solve all problems.”

“A government that is just, a government that is trustworthy, that becomes people-centred, that is Islamic. We must see what a government professes, what the government does, and if it is good, that is Islamic. A government can have Islamic values, without the label Islamic.”

“Between theatre and substance, I would declare

are driven by the impulse for power, territory and resources, and by resistance to this. There is indeed a clash of fundamental interests.”

Mr Abdullah, who was also attending the World Economic Forum at Davos, was more sanguine about the immediate prospects for the world economy and world trade. If the Doha round of trade negotiations broke down, “I don’t say that failure would be a disaster. World trade will go on... If we cannot negotiate some kind of arrangement through the WTO then free trade will go on, bilaterally or regionally.”

He admitted that Malaysia was getting caught in the competition for foreign investment by the rise of China, India and Vietnam. “We cannot any longer be a low cost producer,” he said. “We are moving up the value chain. We are offering higher skills. We want to be a hub for outsourcing.”

A government should not be judged by its label of Islamic or non-Islamic, he said.

“People want their children to be employed. People want schools. People want economic programmes to enable them to get employment and earn some money. That is what they have in common.”

‘Never before has the tension been as pervasive or as extensive’ between the western and Muslim worlds

the people, for the Muslims who have been attacked, who have been marginalised and treated unjustly by other countries.’

“What is happening now in the Middle East has made even the moderates angry. That is not good.”

Mr Abdullah, whose mild language and less confrontational attitudes mark a stark contrast to the angry anti-western rhetoric of his predecessor, Mahathir Mohamad, spoke out against those Mus-

more for the substance.”

In a speech last week to the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, Mr Abdullah rejected the idea that the world was split by a “clash of civilisations”, although he admitted that “never before has the tension been as pervasive or as extensive” between the western and Muslim worlds.

“They may mobilise themselves along ideological or religious lines,” he said. “But at heart the conflicts

Abdullah Badawi: ‘Trying to resolve terrorism without examining its root causes is like trying to fertilise the fruits and not the roots’ Daniel Lynch

Full transcript: www.ft.com/abdullah
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