

PM: Armed forces must identify terrorists at an early stage

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KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called on the armed forces to upgrade their efficiency in intelligence-gathering to thwart more complex and challenging terror threats.

Dr Mahathir said the threat of war in Malaysia was unlike that in other countries, which might be attacked by a neighbour or superpower and needed a huge army for defence, but more towards "a problem of dealing with terrorists".

Modern-day terrorists, he said, posed a big challenge not just to Malaysia, but also the world.

"They do not wear uniforms. They camouflage themselves well in the public to carry out their dastardly acts," he said during a visit to the Defence Ministry here yesterday.

Malaysia's preparations, he said, revolved around information and intelligence.

"We must be able to identify, at an early stage, who a terrorist could be because he (or she) will undergo training or has close ties with terrorist groups."

He said during his tenure as defence minister from 1981 to 1986,

one of the major threats to the country was guerilla warfare by the Communist Party of Malaya.

"Our defence and approach have to be different to suit the times. The threats are no longer concentrated from within the country, but come from various angles, with our enemies influenced by different ideologies and beliefs."

He said the government would ensure that the armed forces were adequately equipped and modernised to carry out tasks.

A White Paper to this effect, he said, was being prepared for Parliament, outlining the defence principles, strategy and development.

Defence Minister Mohamad Sabu said many Malaysians had died over the years after becoming terrorists to champion the Islamic State's cause in Syria.

"We became aware of this after their next of kin approached us for assistance to repatriate their bodies. We want to know who was sponsoring them to be trained for war, as they are terrorists and a threat to the nation and the world." **By Manirajan Ramasamy and Adrian David**