

Interview Between PM And Japanese Magazine "Chuokoron".

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 11 January 2002

Q. How do you see the development in Afghanistan?

A. It is going to be very messy. Because that is the way of Afghanistan. They have many different tribes and many different warlords, each one will pull towards different directions, so forming a coalition with the purpose of defeating Taliban is one thing. Forming a coalition to govern Afghanistan is totally different. This is where they will be disunited, and they cannot govern Afghanistan properly. Also they are also guilty of atrocities against the people of Afghanistan. Of course the Northern Alliance is more liberal minded than the Taliban. But the Northern Alliance include many other warlords, leaders of different tribes, and of different regions. In order for the coalition to be effective, everybody must be brought in. But they cannot agree among themselves.

Q. Is there any good way to solve this problem?

A. It is very difficult. Because these people are very factional, and they cannot agree among themselves. What they need is a very strong leader. But Ahmad Shah Massoud has been killed. He and Burhanuddin Rabbani provided a strong leadership, but Rabbani cannot provide military leadership that Masood provided. There will be a lot of infighting. It will take time.

Q. How do you see the role of the UN? A. They should play the honest broker. The United Nations should try to bring the people together. To help the people is the most important thing. To provide aid, food, to repair the damaged roads, etc.

Q. Are you still against of the US attack on Afghanistan?

A. Well it has removed the Taliban, but as you see, the Northern Alliance is not going to cooperate with the United States or Britain. They refused the British. The British happily landed there thinking that the Northern Alliance had won and they could come in, but they are told to get out. Afghanistan is like that. They are very independent.

Q. Will this be like repeating the Vietnam War?

A. It can be like that. If the United States tries to enforce their rule on Afghanistan there will be a fight because

Afghanistan will never allow foreigners to rule their country or dominate their country no matter who they are.

Q. Why are there negative feelings towards US even here in Malaysia?

A. It is a general feeling in Malaysia including from the opposition parties. Maybe opposition parties are stronger in their views. Nearly everyone is opposed to the US attack on Afghanistan because most of the people killed in Afghanistan are innocent people. Some members of the Taliban will be captured but most will escape. Osama bin Laden's people will escape. It will be very difficult to arrest them, even if you do, there will be no guarantee that the Al Qaeda members who are outside of Afghanistan will not be active. He has cells in many different countries. We understand this kind of operation because we were dealing with terrorists in Malaysia.

Q. What terrorist are you talking about in Malaysia?

A. After World War Two, there were 12,000 armed Chinese Communists. The only way to tackle them is to address their grievances. Once you remove their grievances, then the people will not support terrorist activities. In the same way we have always been advocating for the basic causes of terrorism be tackled. If you don't tackle that, you can never be assured if somebody who is on his own would not become a terrorist. Because they are prepared to die, it doesn't require many people to do something. One person will be enough to do lots of damage.

Q. In Malaysia, there are some Malaysians who are related to Al Qaida?

A. Yes, about 50. We have tracked down quite a number of them. They were trained in Afghanistan.

Q. Do you think this is a war against Islam?

A. So far, the focus is only on Muslim terrorist, as if there is no other terrorist. We know for sure that there are a lots of terrorist in the world. In Japan, you have Aum Shinrikyo. You used to have the Japanese Red Army. They came here and took over the American International Assurance Building where the US embassy was located. We had to exchange prisoners etc. Terrorists are everywhere and this requires international action. There must be international cooperation by giving information and not discriminating between terrorists. The terrorists are not Muslims alone. Look at Bosnia, Chechnya. There were 200,000 Bosnian Muslims killed. But there was no

world movement, coalition to fight against Serbian terrorism. So it gives the impression that the death of 200,000 Muslims is not as important as 6,000 people who died in America. That is the impression that is given. You can't get the Muslim countries to cooperate when they see only Muslim terrorists are hunted. In Britain they even discriminate between their terrorist and foreign terrorist by law.

Q. Have you read Clash of Civilizations by Samuel Huntington?

A. I went through it. It is a war against terrorism, but selective war against terrorism so far. There is no desire to go after other terrorists including in Palestine which is the most important question for the Muslims. Recently five children were killed by Israelis. It seems that it is acceptable. That is the feeling of the Muslims. One billion Muslims feel the same way.

Q. Do you think this war will be extended to more harsh relationship in the Middle East?

A. If the killing of Palestinians goes on, it will. Yes, Palestinians also kill the Israelis. What they do is very little. If they kill one Israeli, then 10 Palestinians will be killed. If ten Palestinians are killed, then the Palestinians want to kill more Israelis, so there is retaliation again. It continues, never stops. You cannot expect Arafat to tell his people, don't attack the Israelis. When some Palestinians know their own brothers and children have been killed by Israelis, and then say we have the Peace Treaty so please stop attacking Israelis, they cannot stop. Arafat is not as strong as the Israeli government, he also has to face various groups of his supporters who would only support him if they think he is right. For him to just order them to stop, it won't work. He is not even head of a real independent government. They won't even allow him to set up a State. In a country where the government is very weak, people become anarchic. They don't care about law and order. They do what they like. You cannot expect Arafat to control. The Israelis can control their people. But it is clear that they are not going to control their people. If Arafat's people kill them, they will kill more. The only way to forcibly separate the two is by putting a UN force inside there. Of course UN force will run the risk of being killed but unless they are there and separating and watching over the activity by the Palestinians and the Israelis, the fighting will never stop. Everytime they have Peace a Treaty, the Palestinians who are angry about their losses will attack Israelis, because the Israelis still occupy their land, destroy their

houses and put up Israeli settlements on the land of the Arabs.

Q. How can you divide the territory where both claim that it is theirs. A. Israel territory is very clear and that is what was given to them. Since then, they have conquered Palestinian territory. They don't want to be confined to any border. Until now they have not defined the border of Israel but that is a second thing. But first, separate them physically, then only decide which part is Israel, and which part is Palestine. But you must go and separate them first.

Q. If UN force will go there, Malaysia will participate?

A. Yes, we are willing, but you need a strong force and it should be impartial. You should take action on both. If Israelis attack Palestinians, then you have to arrest the Israelis. Even though they may be government soldiers. If you don't do that, then you cannot ask Arafat to arrest his men but, Israel will never arrest their own people.

Q. After Bush administration, Bush has been to close to the Israel side, isn't he? Where as Clinton tried to mediate both side, at least to listen?

A. I don't want to say anything about President Bush because we are trying to make friends with President Bush. But frankly, he left the Palestinian issue to Israel. He decided to let Israel settle this thing. Sharon is responsible of so many killings and massacres of Palestinians in Sabra and Shatilla in Lebanon. He was a general, one of the most vicious generals. When he is the leader of the government, you cannot expect him to negotiate with Arafat. He regards Arafat as a terrorist. He won't even stick to the agreement reached in Norway. He rejected that. It was an agreement solemnly entered into by Israel and Arafat. How can there be peace.

Q. You had a very good discussion with President Bush during APEC summit in Shanghai.

A. I explained that if I agreed with the US attack on Afghanistan, I will not only be attacked by the Islamic opposition party in Malaysia but also rejected by the majority of the people in Malaysia. Malaysians, no matter whether they are PAS or UMNO, or even Chinese or Indians feel that the US shouldn't attack Afghanistan. Of course we sympathise with the US over the incident of September 11. Suppose I said that we must support the US, I will lose support from my people. Even if I am a leader I have to respect the feeling of the people. President Bush understood what I meant. That is why he doesn't press me to support him.

Q. How Japan should play role?

A. Japan should focus on rebuilding Afghanistan, helping refugees. They are innocent people who ran away from their country, but are also a burden on Pakistan. Q. How do you see the development of US and Japan jointly organizing Afghanistan rebuilding conference? A. I think this kind of conference is very important. But still the situation in Afghanistan is not stable, so you have to help the refugees first.

Q. What do you think of Self Defense Force being sent to Afghanistan?

A. I hope they are not going to fight against Afghanistan. But if they are not aggressive and to protect the refugees it is all right.

Q. Is there still sensitive feeling because of World War Two?

A. I think people still remember and still have a fear and it will take a long time for some people to forget. Japan formed its Self Defense Force to protect its own territory. It should remain in that role.

Q. How can you spread the real teachings of Islam?

A. It is difficult. Unlike the Christian religion which has priesthood of whom the Pope is the most powerful and important figure, and he will make the decision, we don't have that system. The reason is the same, we don't want to have anybody to use his position in order to propagate his own interest. But unfortunately we don't have a priest system, anybody who is learned in Islam can make his own interpretation and can even declare a holy war by himself. We have so many people declaring holy wars. For example, in Malaysia, the opposition party talks about Jihad against us fellow Muslims, but it is wrong. When we tell that this is wrong, some people will believe but not all. That is the problem with Islam, because there is no single authority to make any pronouncement. Sometimes we try to have the head of the Al-Azhar University, we take his fatwa, his pronouncement, but other people can still reject. We are divided into many sects. Within each sect, there will be many people with different interpretation. For example, the so called Jihad, is translated as a holy war, but from the teachings of the Prophet, fighting against your own selfish feelings is also Jihad. Fighting against your lust, the desire to gratify yourself is also Jihad. Lots of things, that we do will be interpreted as Jihad. But these people like to equate Jihad to a holy war. Their followers will accept their interpretation. Other people will reject their

interpretation. So it is a bit confusing. Many people cannot understand.

Q. How about the opposition party in Malaysia?

A. They make their own interpretation. They take one sentence from the Koran, sometimes half a sentence and make their own interpretation to suite their objectives. Ignorant people will accept it. It is very difficult to stop them. We explain but it depends, some of them accept, some of them don't. They even teach hatred in kindergarten, which is not Islamic at all. Muslims are supposed to be brothers, but they teach their children to head other Muslims. In Islam there is a lot of flexibility. You do something, only because you can do. If you cannot do, you are not ask to do it. You cannot eat pork, but if you are starving and there is no other food, you can eat pork. The interpretation is that you are only enjoined to follow when you can. If a person tortures you, you can renounce Islam. But in your heart you don't, but verbally you can. They don't want you to die for nothing, just because you continue saying I am Muslim, I am Muslim, until somebody comes and kills you. In the Koran, it is very clear on how to respect other religions. To you your religion, to me my religion, you pray in your own way, and I pray in my own way. Do not force people to embrace your religion. But the followers of Islam themselves like to force people. For example when they win the war, they force the prisoners to accept Islam, or else they will kill them.

Q. How did this kind of narrow interpretation or even wrong teachings of Islam spread?

A. Because we are very strong in our belief. We tend to follow the people who are said to be knowledgeable about Islam. They are called Ulama, the learned ones. They are not satisfied with just teaching Islam. They want power for themselves. So because they have so much influence on people, they want to use the influence to gain power. So in some countries you can have elections, you can have general assembly, but the final say remains with the counsel of Ulama. In the end they will decide. The more fanatical people are towards religion, the more powerful would the ulamas be. All these people will refer to them, anything they will say they will accept.

Q. But unfortunately, non Muslim think that this is Islam.

A. That is true, we cannot blame you for having that impression. If we have views that are different from that extreme view, we may not get the support of the people. Muslims will say that you are not adhering to the teachings

of Islam. Many who try to give the right interpretation of Islam, who go against the learned ones, some of them are killed or assassinated, so they are afraid to say the truth. In Egypt they have the Muslim brotherhood. Anybody who doesn't agree with them, will be killed. So the open minded Muslims are afraid to speak out. Q. Malaysia is quite different. Malaysia is a Muslim country, but harmonize with Chinese and Indian, it is like a showcase. A. I have been able to maintain rationality among the majority of Muslims because I studied the religion. Because when anybody says something wrong, I can point out that this is wrong. What I say is acceptable, even to the religious people. That is why it is possible in Malaysia. If I don't understand the religion, and say that it is old fashion, this is nonsense we are living in the modern world, we have to forget about this, then people will say I don't conform to the religion. But I learned about my religion, I learned the Koran thoroughly, the traditions of the Prophet as well, so I can say this is what the Koran says.

Q. What is the discussion between you and the opposition about Islamic State?

A. Malaysia is an Islamic State. The interpretation is where Muslims have the authority even if it is shared, and non-Muslims are not oppressed, they are free to practice their religion, no hindrance, that makes an ideal Islamic State. There are so many interpretations of Islamic State. There are 54 Muslim countries in the world. They are not exactly the same. Some proclaim themselves as Islamic Republics, some are called Secular State, but they are all governed by Islam. They are recognized as Muslim countries. Among those 54 countries, Malaysia is one of them. In Malaysia, Muslims are free to practice their religion, Muslim laws are upheld but only applied to Muslims. Islam is the official religion of this country. So the opposition cannot say that Malaysia is not a Muslim country. A lot of countries look to Malaysia as a model of an Islamic country. Many of them come to see how a country that is ruled by Muslims can prosper, can be stable, can be peaceful, despite having many non Muslims.

Q. How can a Muslim country cope with the Western world?

A. Normal relationship. It shouldn't make any difference that we are a Muslim country. Our relation with them is just a relation between two different countries. This is what I emphasize. We are an independent country, we have our own policies, we don't disturb your internal affairs, we want to have relations with you, we want to trade with you, we want to have diplomatic relationship with you, but you don't try

to impose on us with your own system or ideology. We will not to Islamize you as well. That is all.

Q. US is an important trading partner with Malaysia, how is this affected?

A. It harmed the economy not only in Malaysia. The US is a buyer of 20% of Malaysian goods. The manner of the attack using civil aircraft, caused so much damage that people are afraid of flying, not only tourist but also the business community. So it is very difficult to do business, because people are not contacting each other. You can contact by internet, but it is not the same. You must see the country, you must visit and see each other to do business. So it is affecting the whole world.

Q. How can a region cooperate?

A. I think there is room for us to cooperate to exchange information, to overcome this fear of terrorist attacks. We are not a target because we have not been involved in supporting actions that are against Islam. As you point out that there are terrorist in Japan as well. One of the reasons why there are terrorist is extreme capitalism which people are violently opposed to. This we also have to correct, this capitalism that exploits the whole world without caring. For example the currency traders made us all poor, that is very bad. Because the countries of East Asia were just trying to develop, suddenly became poor, millions of people became jobless. So the feeling of the people is very much against capitalism and it became stronger and stronger. Today capitalism recognize no restriction. They want to impose this on the globalized world, so that they can go anywhere and make as much money as they like. And when they want to they will pull out the money, as a result, you lose everything, your economy collapses', but they don't care as long as they save their own money. If a company is bankrupted it doesn't matter, if the people commit suicide, thousands lose their jobs, they are accused of inefficiency. In Japan, you want to follow the Western system, before you had life time employment so you had little social problems. But now, if the business is not doing well, first sack your own workers. With Americans you can sack that is all right. They will go to the door and collect some unemployment pay from the government and they are OK. But in Japan, if you are sacked, you are ashamed, you don't go to your family so it will create a big social problem. So while one system may be good for one country it should not be imposed on all countries. Because the result can be disastrous. For Japan, it is difficult to recover. Any change at any time causes disruption. When you change for a system that is totally unsuitable for your

culture, then you will have a prolonged bad effect. Look at Indonesia. The Suharto government was authoritarian. But Indonesia was peaceful, no breakaway, millions of people were employed. Then you changed to democracy, of course democracy is good, but people didn't understand how they should make democracy work. They thought democracy means freedom, they can overthrow governments, demonstrate on the street, even revolt against the government and try to form your own state, fight between Muslims and Christians, which they never did before. They are not used to democracy, and as a result the country is still unable to pick up.

Q. During the crisis, you are told not to help private companies which are bailing out, now the US is doing it, and you suggested to monitor the hedge fund, now they are asking to monitor terrorist money?

A. Yes that is right. All the airline companies are being bailed out, US government is injecting 17 billion dollars. And they are asking 50 billion dollars more. They are nearly bankrupt. This is what they have been saying to us during the crisis, and now all their airlines are going to be bankrupt without government support.

Q. Now the US is the only super power, do you think another super power such as China is needed?

A. I think China is trying to move closer to Russia in order to try to balance things. I think balance is always very good, if you don't have any option to change sides and with, only one superpower it will misbehave. The US can be one superpower and become very popular, if it shows a caring attitude towards the rest of the world. There was a time when the US tried to help people, they were very popular. But now sanctions against this country and that, they are saying you are not democratic so we will not give money, this kind of attitude is causing dislike for the US. Some Americans realize this, because there are certain pressure group within the country, they are not able to make use of their wealth and power to win support of themselves. If the US were to help countries genuinely, not to try and exploit them but to help these countries, they can build a great civilization for the whole world. I am against war, because it is very damaging. Why can't we sit down and help each other. There is enough wealth in this world to ensure nobody starves, nobody will die because of it, enough shelter, foods. US per capita is 30,000 dollars. In many countries per capita is less than 100 dollars. What are you doing with 30,000 dollars. Even if you eat, you will overeat, but if you give just a little bit, many people can survive. The world is obsessed with money and wealth. Everything is focused on wealth and money, very

selfish. The world must concentrate on the well being of people. Now there is no religion just hedonism, the love of pleasure. We really have to think about others. That is why today the world is in such a state of turmoil. Capitalism has gone crazy.