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Mahathir-Gulf

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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 23 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is not taking sides in the Gulf war but is on the side of justice, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said unlike opposition parties, in particular PAS which was openly supporting Iraq and condemning Saudi Arabia, the government was neutral.

+We are not condemning anyone, what we want is justice. Our stand is clear -- we don't agree with the conquest of one country by another,+ he told reporters at a press conference at his office here.

+We opposed Vietnam for trying to conquer Cambodia, we opposed the Soviet Union for trying to conquer Afghanistan and we also opposed the United States for over-running Panama and Granada,+ he added.

However, he said, the role of Malaysia at the United Nations (UN) was limited for by being a small nation it could only make proposals but could not force another country to heed its calls. -- more

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+We regret that war has broken out when it could have been avoided if Iraq had withdrawn from Kuwait.+

He said Malaysia did not side with the United States when it supported the UN Security Council resolution authorising the use of force against Iraq but it only wished to save the people of Kuwait.

+We agreed that Kuwait should be freed but never agreed that Iraq should be destroyed,+ he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir regretted that the Western press did not give the actual picture on the effect of the allied forces' attack on Iraq as the news was censored by the United States military.

+We have been told that thousands of tonnes of bombs had been dropped on Iraq but we have no proof whether the bombs were aimed at military targets or ordinary people,+ he said. -- more

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+This is regrettable because a country which speaks loudly about press freedom should not censor anything about destruction,+ he said.

He said based on reports received, B-52 bombers had been used and they were noted as +carpet bombers+ which bombed everything irrespective of whether they were military targets or not.

He said Malaysia had agreed to the call by Iran that the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) meet as soon as possible to stop the war.

Unfortunately, the Iranian proposal had not been agreed to by the majority of Muslim countries as only 10 agreed to it.

+But if we are able to attend the OIC conference we wish to call for an end to the war and also urge Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait,+ the Prime Minister said.

On PAS' proposal to send volunteers to Iraq, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the government did not oppose the plan just as it did not oppose the going of volunteers to Afghanistan.

On Malaysia's proposal for the creation of an East Asian economic grouping, the Prime Minister said Malaysia wished to get the agreement of its Asean partners first before extending the idea to countries such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

He hoped that an agreement on the formation of the grouping could be reached as soon as possible so that a meeting towards that end could be held before the end of this year. -- Bernama

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