

Dr Mahathir: Malaysia against wanton destruction of Iraq

By Robert Goh

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — Malaysia wants Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait but is against the wanton destruction of Iraq by the Allied bombings in the process, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Responding to questions on the Gulf war at a Press conference called to announce a pay hike for civil servants, the Prime Minister said Malaysia could accept Iraqi troops being attacked in the process of liberating Kuwait.

"We are told that several thousand tonnes of bombs have been dropped on Iraq but we don't know whether these were aimed at military or civilian targets.

"However, there are reports that B-52 bombers are being used (in the US-led Allied attack against

Iraq to force its withdrawal from Kuwait).

"If reports of deployment of carpet bombing are true, then the bombing will not be concentrated only on military targets.

"The problem now is that we have no clear picture on what is actually happening in Iraq.

"The picture we are getting is censored by United States military censors. It does not show the destruction that is sure to have taken place.

"This saddens us because this is coming from a country that talks about Press freedom."

Dr Mahathir expressed sadness that war had broken out when it could have been avoided if Iraq had withdrawn from Kuwait.

He also said that Iran had invited Malaysia before war broke out to attend an Organisation of Islamic

Conference (OIC) summit to prevent the conflict.

However, only Malaysia and 10 others of the 46-member grouping agreed, short of the majority needed to hold the summit.

Asked what role Malaysia could play as all indications are that it was going to be a long war, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia, being a small country, could only try to exert moral pressure in the United Nations to end the war.

On the Iraqi missile attacks on Israel, he said Malaysia would like Israel to show restraint and not retaliate.

"But we cannot foresee what they will do ... they can be quite brutal as evident from their actions against Palestinians in the occupied territories.

"Our stand is the same. We have always opposed the occupation of Palestine

by Israel but that does not mean that what it has done should be followed by any other country."

On the linkage between the Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait and the Palestinian question, Dr Mahathir said these were two separate matters because when Kuwait was invaded by Iraq, there was no mention of a desire to liberate Palestine.

"However, if the linkage will not delay the coming of peace, we are willing to link these matters," he said, expressing confidence that this idea would receive wide support.

On the move by Pas to recruit volunteers to help Iraq, he said that was their decision and it was not a neutral one.

"We have no objections if anyone wants to go to fight for Iraq. If they want to go, let them go."