

▼20/02/16-29MST

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Mahathir-Serbia

MALAYSIA'S STAND ON BOSNIA REMAINS UNCHANGED, SAID MAHATHIR

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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 20 ^{9c} (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Malaysia's call for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) to equip United Nations peacekeepers in Bosnia-Herzegovina with weapons is not an excuse to waive strikes against the Serb forces.

He said no one could accuse Malaysia of having changed its stand (regarding support for Bosnia) because of the "fear" of attacks against the United Nations Protection Forces (UNPROFOR).

"I wish to stress that Malaysia is committed. We are not going to use this as an excuse for waiving attacks against Serbia or their weapons positions," he told a news conference at his residence, Seri Perdana, here.

He said he had yet to receive any feedback from Nato on the request for arming the peacekeepers adequately.

Malaysia has 1,500 troops led by Kol Hashim Hussein serving with UNPROFOR. The soldiers are equipped with light arms such as rifles and mortars, suitable for their mission as peacekeepers. -- more

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Mahathir-Serbia 2 (last) Kuala Lumpur

Last Wednesday, Chief of Defence Forces Jen Tan Sri Borhan Ahmad said Malaysian soldiers in Bosnia would be unable to withstand any retaliatory attacks by Serb forces if Nato launched air strikes, scheduled for tomorrow, because they were inadequately equipped with weapons.

However, Malaysia's representative to the United Nations, Tan Sri Razali Ismail, had given the assurance he would convey to the UN Malaysia's request for Nato to arm its soldiers.

Dr Mahathir referred to the permission granted for troops from Russia, which clearly supported the Serbs, to be deployed in Bosnia, and asked whether it was fair that troops from Turkey were denied permission because it reportedly supported Bosnia.

He said it was "hypocrisy working at its best".

Commenting on Nato's warning to Serbia that it would launch air strikes if the Serb forces did not withdraw from Sarajevo tomorrow morning, Dr Mahathir said he did not think Nato will strike.

"I'm sure there will be no bombing. I'm willing to bet there'll be no bombing. Assurances or no assurances, there'll be no bombing," he said. --

Bernama

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