

22 AUG 1998

LEAD Mahathir-Attack

LAUNCHING MISSILE STRIKES AN ACT OF COWARDICE, SAYS PM

KOTA BAHARU, Aug 22 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the launching of missile strikes on innocent people by a Western nation seeking to avenge the death of its people is an act of cowardice.

He said that such tyranny was inflicted on nations that had not declared war against the Western nation.

"If they wish to strike back, then do so (against the alleged terrorists).

"But launching missile strikes against the innocent people is an act of cowardice," he said at the meet-the-people session at Sekolah Kebangsaan Kampung Chengal in Ketereh, about 20km from here.

Dr Mahathir did not name any nation but it was obvious he was referring to the United States which launched missile strikes against alleged terrorist targets in Afghanistan and Sudan to strike back against the bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania two days ago.

Dr Mahathir said that the missile strikes against Afghanistan and Sudan should not have been launched unless the two nations had declared war against it.

"Actually, between two nations, one should not attack the other unless war has been declared. But (in the case of the missile strikes against Afghanistan and Sudan), the government, not others but the government, had directed that the missile strikes be launched," he said.

He said there was no doubt that the action by that nation in launching the missile strikes against Afghanistan and Sudan was to strike back against parties responsible for the bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

"But the action in bombing the embassies was not made by the government, not made by the Sudanese or the Afghan governments or the Saudi (Arabian) government. It was made by people not responsible to (any) government," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was aware that his statement would attract the attention of certain parties towards Malaysia.

"They have already claimed that Malaysia is not a safe place for them. I do not understand why it is not safe because in their country, they are not free to move about, there will always have to be security checks.

"But in Malaysia, we are still free to move around. We have no fear of bombs being hurled at us or that we may be shot. But in their country, it is not safe," he said.

Dr Mahathir expressed regret that although the situation in Malaysia was safe, they alleged otherwise and had closed their embassy.

"I am disappointed because we are capable of providing protection to all the foreign missions in Malaysia. It is our responsibility," he said.

He said that foreigners working in their missions were guests of the country and their safety would be safeguarded at all times.

"As such, do not have fear being in Malaysia. In Malaysia, we are safe and we will strive to ensure that we are all safe and our guests are also safe," he said.

Dr Mahathir hoped that his statement would not be misconstrued by certain parties and lead them to accuse Malaysia of supporting those responsible for the bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

"And they may then launch missile strikes at us. We cannot yet believe

that they will not do it. Two days ago, we did not believe it, but today we do believe it. This is the justice of the world with only one super power," he said.

The prime minister said that there were more oppression since the world was left with only one super power.

"Previously, we have no fear of being attacked, but now we should be because attacks have already started on our economy and our currency.

"When will attacks be made on other facilities of ours we do not know yet. But we can no longer believe in people like that," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that the people must act now to help the nation to revive its economy and to defend its independence.

He said that the people were still resilient now to deal with the situation and should not wait until the economy was under severe pressure like what had happened in other countries.

"We have not yet experienced severe pressure, real economic meltdown but let us not wait for what had happened in other nations where 22 million workers are deprived of jobs, the people do not have enough food, are without medicines, cannot provide milk for their children...", he said.

Dr Mahathir said: "Our country is still calm, peaceful, stable and in such an environment we still have the capacity to draw up measures to face this challenge, the greatest we have faced so far."

In this respect, Dr Mahathir called on the people to refrain from actions that could create tension and chaos in the country "as it will reduce our capability in facing up to pressures aimed at us."

He said that the people should understand factors for the depreciation of the Ringgit and the crash of the stock market and to manage their finances wisely including giving preference to local goods.

As for traders, he said that they should give preference to dealing in local goods and in currencies like the Yen, Baht, Peso and Ringgit if they need to conduct transactions abroad.

"With the full support of the people, we will overcome this attempt to colonise this country once again. What we are doing is to defend our independence, that is all," he said.

Dr Mahathir, in reference to the 41st National Day celebrations on Aug 31, said: "If we regard ourselves as an independent race, we must be responsible to ensure our independence."

Among those present were Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa, Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamad, Dewan Negara President Tan Sri Mohamad Yaakob and former Deputy Prime Minister Tun Ghafar Baba.

-- BERNAMA

BD RM