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Government, Opposition condemn strikes on Iraq (HL)

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Government and opposition parties today condemned the United States-British military strikes against Iraq which left five dead and 30 injured.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that this was a clear demonstration of double standards on their part.

There was no need for an attack on Iraq because its neighbour whom Iraq had purportedly threatened, did not even ask for Iraq to be attacked, he said.

"The use of force is more in the interest of the people who apply the force, not because of violence on the part of others.

"For example, in Kosovo more people are being killed. People in Kosovo are being massacred and the whole country is being destroyed, but we don't see the application of the same kind of force," he told a Press conference at the end of his four-day stay in Hanoi where he attended the Sixth Asean Summit.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had always held the view that disputes should not be settled by the use of force.

"There is too much readiness to use missiles against people who are practically helpless. We think there are other more severe breaches of the peace upon which the US has not acted as positively as it has over Iraq," he said.

The US fired hundreds of missiles on Iraq today in attacks that lasted through the night and Baghdad shook with explosions and anti-aircraft fire.

US President Bill Clinton in a televised speech from the White House, said: "I have ordered a strong, sustained series of air strikes against Iraq. Their mission is to attack Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programmes and its military capacity to threaten its neighbours."

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, in a statement over Radio Baghdad, called on Iraq's people to resist the attacks adding: "Fight the enemies of God, the Arab nation and humanity. God willing, you will be the victors," he said.

Meanwhile Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, in a statement released by Wisma Putra, condemned the military strikes, describing them as setting a dangerous precedent.

He said the strikes violated the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes and the Charter of the United Nations.

He also urged member countries of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organisation of Islamic Conference to oppose it in the strongest manner.

"Malaysia counsels dialogue and consultation which is essential to maintain the credibility of the United Nations' process to monitor Iraq's disarmament programme.

"We see no justification for the military action which constitutes an aggression against Iraq and which has also undermined the mandate of the UN Security Council.

"Malaysia calls for the urgent convening of an emergency session of the UN Security Council to discuss the situation and to bring a stop to the military action against Iraq. Iraq, on its part, must ensure full compliance with UN Security Council resolutions."

The eight-year-old sanctions has already exacted an excessive toll on the Iraqis and in this regard the latest military strikes were totally

ill-conceived.

"They only further undermine peace and security in the region."

He said force could not be used as a means to deal with international disputes except where aggression had been committed or where massacres had been perpetrated as in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

"Malaysia calls on the US and the United Kingdom to cease forthwith their military action against Iraq."

DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang said in a statement that the party deplored the bombing of Iraq which "would be seen by the world as a cynical use of force" by Clinton to save his presidency from impeachment.

He said what was most unacceptable was that the strikes took place while the UN Security Council was holding an emergency meeting to discuss the report by UN weapons inspector Richard Butler.

Butler's report had said Baghdad had broken its promises to allow full access to UN arms inspectors.

"Why did Clinton not wait for the outcome of the emergency meeting, unless the President was more concerned about pre-empting the impeachment proceedings of the US House of Representatives?"

In Alor Star, Pas condemned the bombing of Iraq and accused Clinton of making the Islamic country a "victim" to save his political future.

Pas president Datuk Fadzil Noor said Clinton was using Iraq to cover up his evildoing in his sex scandal.

"Pas strongly condemned the military action and we urge the world to denounce the action."

"An international commission must be formed to assess the damage done by the US in Iraq."

Parti Rakyat Malaysia president Dr Syed Husin Ali also questioned the timing of the attack, which occurred a day before Clinton's impeachment process was due to begin.

"Now, owing to the military development, the impeachment process has been put on hold," he said.

For the unfortunate victims, the US aggression will be a greater tragedy because Ramadan and Christmas are so near.

"This is actually the time to promote peace and goodwill among people. But of course the US Government practises double standards."

In Rantau Panjang, Kelantan, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman today condemned the attack on Iraq.

Describing the attack as "shocking", he said Malaysia would not condone any military attack on another country as it involved the lives of civilians."

In Kuala Lumpur, the military strikes drew more condemnation from several quarters here today.

Non-governmental organisation Suaram called upon all peace-loving nations in the world to condemn the air strikes, which it described as a barbaric act, and to pressure the International Court of Justice to prosecute the US and Britain for their act.

Its co-ordinator S. Arutchelvan said the air strikes were not sanctioned by the UN Security Council and this went against the UN Charter and all international human rights standards.

"Suaram calls for all the immediate halt to all US and Britain's aggression against the people of Iraq. We also call for all economic embargoes on Iraq to be lifted immediately," he said.

In a statement, Malaysian Sociological Research Institute chairman Dr Alijah Gordon said there was no more logic for the bombing of Baghdad than for the Republicans bombing Washington because they considered Clinton to be an abuser of power.

She said it did not take a hero to hit a largely unprotected civilian

population, adding that the price of hostilities against the Iraqi people was the death of hundreds of Iraqi children.

The Gerakan also strongly condemned the US strikes on Iraq saying it was carried out totally based on the report of one person, Richard Butler, chief of the UN weapons inspection team.

"The US has taken one too many themselves, they should be condemned for taking this unilateral action in order to attack a defenceless country," said party president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik.

Lim, who is Primary Industries Minister, said the UN Security Council should call for a meeting to censure the US action.

Meanwhile, The Council for the Malaysian People's Justice Movement (Gerak) also condemned the bombing.

Its chairman Datuk Fadzil, who is also Pas president, said Gerak saw their act as "wild and barbaric".

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