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Mahathir-Iraq

MALAYSIA WANTS US-IRAQ CRISIS TO BE RESOLVED THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS

By: E.Sivabalan

KUALA LUMPUR, June 30 (Bernama) -- Malaysia wants the crisis between the United States and Iraq over Baghdad's refusal to allow weapons inspectors into the country to be resolved through negotiations and not through military action.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the best way to resolve the crisis was still through negotiations.

"I hope this matter will be settled through diplomacy," he told reporters at his Hari Raya open house at Sri Perdana here.

He said this when asked to comment on the stand-off between the United States and Iraq with Washington warning that it would take military action against Iraq if Baghdad disallowed the inspection of dangerous weapons to continue.

The Russian and French leaders as well as United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan also want the crisis to be resolved through diplomacy.

Dr Mahathir also welcomed Russia's move to bring the United States and Iraq to the conference table in an effort to diffuse the crisis.

Russia sent its Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Posuvalyuk to Iraq recently with a letter from President Boris Yeltsin for President Saddam Hussein.

Dr Mahathir said if the United States proceeded with its plan to take military action against Iraq, many innocent lives would be lost.

"If Iraq is bombed, it is unlikely that innocent people will not be killed. It is impossible for others not to be hit, even how accurate the target was."

"They cannot release the bomb exactly on target. Usually others also will become victims," the Prime Minister said when commenting on Washington's warning to Baghdad that American fighter planes would bomb areas in Iraq suspected to have dangerous weapons.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was reported to have said that Washington was ready to launch unilateral military action without the support of the international community to ensure the end of Iraq's biological, chemical and nuclear weapons programme.

In Paris today, Albright was reported to have said attempts to resolve the crisis diplomatically were "all but exhausted" and the time was fast approaching to take fundamental decisions on Iraq.

The Prime Minister was also asked if the U.S. was imposing its will on the UN to take action against Iraq

Dr Mahathir said the Albright statement did not reflect the spirit of joint action along with other countries. -- BERNAMA

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