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US missile attacks a cowardly act, says Dr M

Farush Khan; Manisah Ismail

KOTA BARU, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today described the launching of cruise missile attacks by the United States on Afghanistan and Sudan as a cowardly act.

He said the US armed forces should not have done so as it endangered the lives of innocent people.

Dr Mahathir's comments came even as the US today warned of more strikes against suspected terrorist bases (see story on Page 18).

"It's true it (the missile attack) was in retaliation against the bombings of their embassies, but the bombings were not done by Sudan, Afghanistan or Saudi Arabia, but irresponsible people.

"If they (US) want to attack, they should attack those responsible. Those who attack the public merely to retaliate are cowards," he told a huge crowd at the meet-the-people session at Sekolah Kebangsaan Kampung Chengal Kadok.

Dr Mahathir said he realised that his statement might draw the attention of the West to Malaysia which they had claimed was unsafe.

"This is because their countries are not safe ... there are restraints in their security, but in Malaysia we are still free to go anywhere. There is no fear that bombs will be hurled or we get shot."

He said because it thought Malaysia was also not safe, the US closed its embassy in Kuala Lumpur.

"I am so saddened (by this) as we can afford to give protection to all embassies. This is our responsibility. They are our guests, so we will look after the safety of our guests.

"Therefore, do not be afraid. In Malaysia, we are safe and our guests will also be safe," he said to applause from the crowd.

Dr Mahathir said he hoped that his remarks on the US missile attacks would not be interpreted as supporting terrorists.

He also said incidents such as those and the attacks on currencies showed that Malaysians could not depend on foreigners to help improve their standard of living or to ensure their safety.

"It is we ourselves who have to ensure that our country continues to be independent and that our economy is revived."

He urged everyone, including the opposition, to understand the situation and not be misled by the foreign media.

"There have already been attempts to change the Government in Malaysia with one which can bow to their wishes."

He also wanted everyone, including the opposition, to support the Government in its efforts to revive the economy by maintaining unity, being wise in their spending and buying local goods.

"That's all we are asking from the people. We are not asking them to carry arms or fly warplanes."

During a Press conference later, when asked whether Malaysia would make a formal protest on the missile attacks, Dr Mahathir said it would not as the US was a big power and Malaysia's protest would have no bearing on it.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Kelantan Umno chief, was accorded a traditional welcome when he and his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali arrived at Kampung Chengal.

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