

Stop bombing

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PM: US should stop strikes against Kabul immediately

By LEE YUK PENG

SUBANG: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the United States and its allies should stop the bombings in Afghanistan as many civilians had been killed and nothing had been achieved so far.

"I hope they will stop immediately, whether it is in the month of Ramadan or not," he said when asked to comment on talk that the military action might be halted in the holy month when Muslims throughout the world would fast from sunrise to sunset.

Speaking to reporters at the RMAF base here after returning from his vacation at South Korea's southern resort island of Cheju, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was not the only country to hold the view, adding that Russia, too, felt that diplomatic initiatives should be used to resolve the Afghanistan conflict.

"Until now I have not received any reports to confirm that al-Qaeda members have been killed in the attacks. That is why I don't agree with the war. This is not the way to solve it," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the rational way was to identify the causes and take action to solve them.

Asked whether it was time for the United States to change its foreign policy, Dr Mahathir said:

"It should give consideration to the problem faced by the Palestinians and other Muslim nations."

"I had said this at the Apec summit when meeting (George W.) Bush. It looked like he did not fully agree with me," he said, adding that he believed Bush stopped Israel, but it did not heed the call.

Commenting on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he said the media had portrayed Israel as having retaliated against the Palestinians when in fact, it was the other way round with more Palestinians being killed than the Israelis.

Dr Mahathir said the US media was powerful in influencing the mindset of the public as well as drawing up an agenda for the government by their reports.

To some extent, he said the US media "ran the country."

Commenting on the anthrax problem, Dr Mahathir said the US media had begun to justify in the media that Iraq was the culprit as there were only three countries - the United States, Russia and Iraq - who could use anthrax effectively.

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Musharraf: Need for greater care in bombing raids

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The people will get angry with Iraq and then the (US) government will be forced to act against Iraq," he said.

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, a key US ally in the war against Afghanistan, called for "greater care in bombing raids" to reduce the number of civilian casualties, according to a Reuters report.

Musharraf, walking a tightrope between support for the bombing and opposition from Islamic extremists at home who back Afghanistan's Taliban rulers, said Pakistan was not the only country concerned by the number of civilian casualties.

"There has been, I think, a little bit of excessive collateral damage - that needs to be checked," he said in an interview on ABC's *World News Tonight* on Friday.

Asked if he believed too many civilians were dying in raids to flush out members of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network, Musharraf said:

"Well one doesn't know the figures. This view of children and women being injured and suffering is the collateral damage that I'm talking about. That's causing considerable concern all over the world, including Pakistan."

Musharraf repeated his advice that the bombing

should stop during the Muslim fasting month.

"Personally, I would be against it because that would give an excuse for all those who are against the action in Afghanistan to raise their voice more," he said.

AFP reported that newspapers in Bangladesh deplored the strikes in Afghanistan, saying they had "become unsupportable."

"The war in Afghanistan has crossed the threshold of tolerance for most people of the world except perhaps for a select group of hawks in the Western world," *The Daily Star* said in an editorial.

"What began as an attack on the Taliban has crossed the boundary into what resembles an attack to symbolise the might of the Western world," it said.

"Not having achieved significant military results and having only added to the terrible conditions of the Afghan people, this is turning from a hunt for terrorists into a war of injustice."

The Financial Express said: "If the war continues in Afghanistan, the agitated Muslims throughout the Islamic countries will turn out to be rebels against the policies of their own governments and eventually will be identified as terrorists."