

16 OCT 2001

Mahathir-Blair

ATTACK ON AFGHANISTAN A FUTILE EXERCISE, MAHATHIR TELLS BLAIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 16 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told his British counterpart Tony Blair today that the ongoing military action in Afghanistan is a futile exercise.

"The war in Afghanistan is going to be an unproductive one," he told Blair in a telephone conversation.

The Prime Minister's Office said in a statement that Dr Mahathir received a call from Blair at 6.40pm and the conversation lasted about 20 minutes.

Blair sought Malaysia's assistance in dealing with the Afghanistan conflict and the Palestinian issue, said the statement.

The United States and Britain have launched air strikes on Afghanistan for the past 10 days after failing to get the Taliban regime to hand over Osmama bin Laden, Washington's prime suspect for the Sept 11 suicide plane attacks on New York and Washington.

The statement quoted Dr Mahathir as telling Blair: "Even in Malaysia, people who had condemned terrorism, take very badly to the attack on Afghanistan."

Dr Mahathir, however, commended Blair for declaring that there should be a Palestinian state.

It was a very good decision that would help to reduce the feeling of anger among Muslims, he said.

Dr Mahathir told Blair that he would like to know how the British press was reporting the conflict and whether both leaders could explain the feelings of the Muslims on the matter.

The British leader was concerned about the public opinion, even in his own country, the statement quoted Dr Mahathir as saying.

Blair, on his part, stressed that the parties involved in attacking Afghanistan were not against Islam or Muslims.

Early this month, US President George W Bush phoned Dr Mahathir to thank the prime minister for his condolences on behalf of Malaysians in the wake of the Sept 11 attacks.

Bush also told Dr Mahathir that the American war on terrorism was "against evil and not Islam".

-- BERNAMA

HK HK SK