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Parliament-Mahathir (Bush)

BUSH MORE RATIONAL NOW, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 8 (Bernama) -- President George W Bush has been more rational in that he does not raise the question of Malaysia's reluctance to back impending United States' strikes against Afghanistan when he telephoned Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad recently, the Dewan Rakyat was told today.

"When he telephoned me I find him rather rational. He did not ask me then that if I do not support the US, then I am with the terrorists.. he did not raise that matter at all," the Prime Minister said.

Replying to a supplementary question from Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang (PAS-Marang), Dr Mahathir told the House that what Bush said instead was that " we should adopt our own approach in combating terrorism".

Abdul Hadi, who is also PAS deputy president, queried the prime minister on Malaysia's stand relating to Bush's statement that countries not siding with the US to attack Afghanistan would be deemed as being with the terrorists.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia could not accept such a statement as it opposed terrorism and believed that attacking Afghanistan was not the solution to the problem.

"But we must bear in mind that Bush was furious when he made the statement soon after the attacks (on New York's World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in Washington on Sept 11) took place and that may explain why he was emotional... but it seems he has cooled down now," said Dr Mahathir.

The prime minister told the House that by opposing terrorism and not siding with the terrorists did not necessarily mean that Malaysia is an American ally for the US strikes against Afghanistan.

Dr Mahathir said he had also written to Bush explaining Malaysia's stand on terrorism ahead of their discussions on the matter when they attend the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) forum meeting in Shanghai later this month.

The prime minister said he had also similarly written to his British counterpart Tony Blair who concurred with Malaysia's call for an international conference to define terrorism besides determining its causes.

Dr Mahathir said given the varying interpretations of terrorism a person may be regarded as a terrorist at one time but such opinion would differ on another occasion.

Dr Mahathir said a host of reasons may provoke a person to commit an act of terror either deliberately or in retaliation for a similar attack by other parties.

Even a country can commit terrorism against another, Dr Mahathir said citing Israel's aggression against Palestine as an example of terrorist acts that killed the Palestinian people, including children, despite available avenues for talks to settle the problem.

As such it was crucial that the international community identify the causes of terrorism and ways to defuse it, Dr Mahathir told the House.

Later, speaking to reporters outside the chamber Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would not take any action or support US strikes against Afghanistan.

"Our stand is that the problem that caused them to resort to terrorism has to be tackled now," Dr Mahathir said.

However, he was convinced that the US attacks on Afghanistan had not

reached the scale of an "all out war" and would not be quite effective as most of the targeted terrorists were outside Afghanistan.

Dr Mahathir said that it was so far clear that the US strikes against Afghanistan launched on Sunday were targeted at those the US regarded as terrorists.

On evidence supplied by the US to Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar last Friday to prove Osama bin Laden's involvement in the Sept 11 attacks on America, Dr Mahathir said he himself had not seen the evidence.

"But if the Foreign Minister says there is evidence, obviously I agree with what my minister says," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia has never allowed violence in the country.

"However, sometimes they want to hand over memorandum, that is permissible but please do it peacefully," he said.

On earlier reports that Osama maintained bank accounts in Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said scrutiny by the government showed there were no such accounts held either by Osama or his Al-Qaeda organisation.

-- BERNAMA
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