

16 NOV 2001

Mahathir-Bush

DR MAHATHIR HAS SENT LETTER TO BUSH TO STOP BOMBING AFGHANISTAN

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 16 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that if the United States wants to fight the Taliban regime in Afghanistan it should use ground forces instead of air strikes.

He said he had sent a letter to US President George W. Bush to express his opinion on how important it was to stop distance bombing in Afghanistan.

He said he had written to Bush and expressed that air strikes and distance bombings should be halted and there should be ground forces to fight the Taliban to minimise damage and aim at the correct target.

"The ground forces can be the Northern Alliance or any other party because ground forces can inflict minimal damage to save innocent lives from being killed," he told reporters after opening a national-level conference on terrorism at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) here.

Asked about the possibility of an early end to the Taliban's control in Afghanistan following the success of the Northern Alliance, Dr Mahathir said he hoped and prayed that they would be successful without much sacrifice of innocent lives.

Dr Mahathir said that if terrorism were to be wiped out, one should find the cause and reason for such acts and one of the things was to resolve the Palestinian issue.

Taking a swipe at Israel's military action against Palestine, Dr Mahathir said Israel should recognise Palestine as a state.

"Each of them (Israel and Palestine) makes use of their terror tactics and the United Nations must come in to separate them. UN forces must be allowed to forcibly separate them,"

"Israel should not fly its helicopters over Palestine and send rockets to Palestine. Such acts constitute an act of terror. They (Israel) are just aggravating the situation,"

"The Arabs recognise Israel and Israel should also recognise the Palestinians," he added.

Dr Mahathir also said that Israel's action on Palestine was not going to help the world counter terrorism.

Asked about fatwa (religious rulings) on terrorism, he said certain people were using religion for political interest.

"We have a National Fatwa Council which is recognised by the government and the people but there are those who use religion for their own interests and do not recognise that only the council has the prerogative to make fatwa.

"They want to make their own fatwa to achieve their own ends. That's why they make fatwa and their followers believe that they have the right to make fatwa," he said.

He said, for example, that certain people had declared a jihad (holy war) and this was a serious matter and a fatwa could not be made arbitrarily.

He said that if there were to be a fatwa on terrorism it should come from one source and it could not be made by one person only but by a group of people who were well-versed not only in religion but also the developments and situation in the world.

To another question on a Thai media report yesterday which said that Malaysia had pressured Myanmar to sack army generals and cabinet members, Dr Mahathir said there was no truth to the report.

He said Malaysia generally worked with the Myanmar government on the process of democratisation.

"They want to democratise but they don't know how to go about it. We just show them. It's their own decision (to sack) and has nothing to do with us," he added.

Myanmar's military leaders started reconciliation talks with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi more than a year ago to restore democracy in that country.

-- BERNAMA

DC HS JK