

25 DEC 2001

Mahathir-Iraq

M'SIA DISAGREES WITH US PLANNED STRIKES AGAINST IRAQ

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 25 (Bernama) -- Malaysia hopes the United States will not target Iraq for its next military strikes should Washington extend its war against terrorism beyond Afghanistan, the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said mounting the next round of strikes against Iraq and Somalia in the US-led global anti-terrorism campaign would not effectively serve as a means towards defusing the problem.

"We hope the (reportedly planned) strikes against Iraq will not take place next after Afghanistan, and then after Iraq... followed by Somalia... that is not the way," Dr Mahathir said.

He was asked on wire-service reports of imminent US strikes against Iraq and Somalia at a news conference during a Christmas open house jointly hosted by the Christian Federation of Malaysia and the Roman Catholic Archbishop Rev Anthony Fernandez in Bukit Nenas here today.

According to wire-service and other reports this week, the US was considering deploying 100,000 troops to Iraq to unseat President Saddam Hussein.

Dr Mahathir also said that Malaysia had earlier voiced disagreement over US-led military strikes on Afghanistan in pursuit of fugitive Saudi millionaire Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda terrorist network following the Sept 11 attacks on New York and Washington.

"We have similarly expressed disagreement over the earlier strikes on Afghanistan," Dr Mahathir said.

The French news agency AFP, quoting a Newsweek report, said that following strong political pressure, the joint chiefs of the US military were studying a plan to despatch 50,000 troops to Iraq's southern borders and another 50,000 to its northern boundary-lines.

-- BERNAMA

RZS NZ RYN