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PM: American media one great propaganda machine

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PETALING JAYA, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today described the American media as "one great propaganda machine" which is now trying to link Iraq to the anthrax attacks in the United States.

Adding that the American media was very powerful, the Prime Minister said there were only three countries in the world which could use anthrax effectively by putting some additives.

"They are the US, Russia and Iraq. Obviously the target (now) is Iraq," he told reporters upon returning from a holiday in Japan and South Korea.

Prior to that, Dr Mahathir attended the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation summit in Shanghai, China.

"So, the beginnings of justifying an attack on Iraq are already being made in the Press. People will now become very angry with Iraq and the US Government will then be forced to act because the Press keeps pushing this line," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the American Press was actually drawing up the agenda for the government by their reports.

"In fact, they mould the thinking of the people. They run the country.

"At this moment, the people in US are very angry because of the way things are reported. It's always demonising all the others," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was natural for the Americans to get angry after reading such reports.

Asked whether the US should stop its raids on Afghanistan with the coming of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Dr Mahathir said the attacks should be halted irrespective of any occasion.

This, he said, was because nothing has been achieved from the attacks so far.

"This is the difference of opinion we have with the Americans but I am glad this is not held against us," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia's views were also supported by other nations including Russia which felt that diplomatic means should be used to find a solution to the terrorist problem. He said Malaysia was against the attack on Afghanistan from day one as civilians were bound to end up as casualties.

"As far as I know, there isn't one confirmed report which stated that members of the Al-Qaeda movement were killed in these attacks.

"That's why we don't agree as we feel that is not the way to deal with the problem," he said.

Dr Mahathir said following these attacks, Israel had gone overboard and attacked Palestinians wantonly. The Israelis, he said, purportedly attacked Palestinians following the assassination of one of its ministers.

He said the killing of the Israeli minister was due to the killing of senior Palestinian officials in Yasser Arafat's government.

"The Palestinians were actually avenging the killing of their people.

"But what you read in newspapers is that it is the Israelis who are actually retaliating against the Palestinians," he said, adding that more Palestinians were killed compared to Israelis.

Asked whether the US should review its foreign policy, especially in relations with Israel and other Muslim nations, Dr Mahathir said this was not for him to decide.

"It's not for me to say ... all we have said is that they (US) should give consideration to the problems faced by the Palestinians and other

Muslim nations," he said, adding that he had conveyed this to President George W. Bush and other leaders during the Apec meeting.

Dr Mahathir said he believed Bush may have told Israel not to retaliate against the Palestinians in such a manner.

"But you know Israel ... how arrogant they can get," he said.

Asked whether the Apec meeting had met its objectives, Dr Mahathir said it had allowed the developing countries to represent their views more effectively. He said this year's meeting did not mention issues concerning globalisation and the opening of markets.

"I put forward the views of developing countries and the need for applying the prosperity neighbour policy," he said.

On Bush's evaluation of him as a person with a very good sense of humour, Dr Mahathir said the US president himself was very friendly.

"Well, I think we went on quite well with each other. I wasn't serious at all times ... I cracked jokes which I can't remember. It was not a solemn occasion."

Asked on his visits to Cheju Island in South Korea and Nagasaki in Japan, Dr Mahathir said it was an opportunity for him to rest.

He said he had wanted to see how the Koreans developed Cheju Island into a resort island, incorporating it with botanical gardens, indoor gardens, and cultivating farms with different climates.

In Nagasaki, the Prime Minister said he had an opportunity to see how the Japanese grew their crops.

"I also had the opportunity to see how they built their pedestrian malls something which we have been trying to build, unsuccessfully, for a long time."

In jest, he said the holiday was also to enable him to finish his work.