

13 OCT 2001
Mahathir-US
SOME PEOPLE SOURING MALAYSIA-US TIES, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 13 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that some people are trying to sour relations between Malaysia and the United States, including by misintepreting remarks he made following the ongoing US air strikes against Afghanistan.

"They are making all kinds of reports about my statement which is taken out of context," he told reporters after opening the Paya Indah Wetlands in Kuala Langat near here.

Dr Mahathir pointed out that Malaysia was not anti-America but only disagreed with the manner in which the US was retaliating against Afghanistan.

"If we are anti-Americans, we wouldn't support the attempt to hunt down terrorists," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had a good relationship with the US and wanted to be friendly with all countries including Afghanistan.

The Prime Minister's Office on Tuesday demanded an Associated Press journalist and the news agency issue a public apology to Dr Mahathir for an incorrect report attributed to the him on the US-led attacks on Afghanistan.

AP on Thursday admitted it had quoted Dr Mahathir out of context in a report by Sean Yoong.

"When (Dr) Mahathir said he would have supported the attackers if they had hit Israel as perpetrators of terrorism against the Palestinians, he was referring to the terrorist attackers who struck on the United States on Sept 11, not to US and British forces," an AP On-line report said.

"We have no love for the Talibans, but we like Afghanistan. We have no liking for the Talibans. We know the Talibans trained Malaysian people to overthrow this government. However, there are people in Afghanistan who are not Taliban followers but they have no choice," he said.

On evidence provided by the US linking Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda network to the Sept 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre (WTC) and the Pentagon, Dr Mahathir said: "We are convinced of terrorism allegedly by these people."

He said Malaysia could accept the US explanation of the Al Qaeda network although they had not given the full evidence.

Dr Mahathir also admitted that there was terrorism in Malaysia.

"They are attacking us and not the US...give us information," he said referring to a New York Times report that Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines were possible targets for future US anti-terrorist actions.

Dr Mahathir also said that even before the Sept 11 attacks in New York and Washington, Malaysia had taken action against people who wanted to use violence in the country.

He was also asked on an article written by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in the latest edition of Time magazine.

Among other things, Anwar, now serving a 15-year jail sentence for corruption and sodomy, wrote that in Malaysia, the government-controlled media have been deployed to stir up anti-American sentiments while members of the political elite use a different language for international diplomacy.

Dr Mahathir asked: "Is he supporting the Al Maunah group and the Kumpulan Militan Malaysia (KMM) who have been implicated for killing (Kedah) state assemblyman Dr Joe Fernandez and exploding bombs?"

Several members of the Al Maunah are on trial on a charge of waging war against the Yang di-Pertuan Agong following an arms heist at two army camps in Perak last year while the government has confirmed that some members of the militant group KMM have received military training in Afghanistan.

"If he supports them, please come and say clearly. He can say whatever he likes," said the prime minister.

Referring to Anwar's article, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had been branded an undemocratic and oppressive country but yet prisoners could write articles for the foreign press.

-- BERNAMA

DC AU RM