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Mahathir-attack

US SHOULD CONSIDER STOPPING ATTACKS ON AFGHANISTAN, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 12 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the United States should consider stopping its air strikes on Afghanistan which have entered their sixth day.

Asked by reporters whether the US should halt the attacks now, he said: "Well they should of course. We are against such an attack because I don't think it is going to help in combating terrorism."

Speaking after opening the second Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) Tourism Ministers meeting here, he said the US air bombings might hit many innocent people but not the terrorists.

"It should be pointed out that the alleged terrorists were not even Afghans," he said.

The US-led attacks are targeted at the ruling Taliban which is said to be harbouring Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden, the prime suspect in the Sept 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington.

It was reported that according to Taliban figures, the number of deaths in Afghanistan from the attacks since Sunday now stands at around 220.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would request the United Nations (UN) to hold a special conference to discuss and define terrorism.

"We are writing to (UN) Secretary-General Koffi Annan to ask him to convene a meeting on terrorism," he said, adding that such a conference was needed as there was a lot of confusion on the subject.

"Some people who are fighting for their own independence are also described as terrorists. Also, the things that people can do or should not do must be determined.

"Even in war, we are not supposed to use gas in order to fight against the enemy. Even if people have to fight for their own independence there are certain things they can't do, among which of course is to kill innocent people," he added.

Dr Mahathir was also asked on Malaysia's stand regarding the evidence presented by the US on the Al-Qaeda movement in this country.

"Well, the evidence is not specific. They indicated certain things but there is nothing that we can do. There is no role for Malaysia," he said.

To another question, the prime minister said he expected Islamic countries to emerge stronger than ever from the current period of misconception over Islam and terrorism.

He said: "Over time, it will be shown that it is just not Muslims who are terrorists. Other people are also terrorists. Our problem now is that certain segment of the world media focuses only on Muslim terrorism and not terrorism by the other people.

On another note, he said the OIC had responded well to the present crisis and was united in its stand on the US attacks on Afghanistan.

World Tourism Organisation secretary-general Francesco Frangialli said the Sept 11 terrorist attacks on the US had caused a 20-30 per cent drop in reservation bookings worldwide.

Unfortunately, the North African and Southeast Asian countries were more affected, especially the Muslim nations, he said.

This was unfair because people can travel safely in these countries, he said.

Frangialli said a World Travel Market meeting would be held in London in the next few weeks to send the message to the world that it was safe to

travel now.
-- BERNAMA
NM MAD JK