

# PM: US, Britain should listen to world opinion

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COPENHAGEN: The United States and Britain should listen to the rest of the world, which disagrees with their decision to attack Iraq over its alleged weapons of mass destruction, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad advised.

"When the world cannot agree (with the plan to attack Iraq), there must be good reasons for it.

"They don't disagree just because they want to be difficult," the Prime Minister said, stressing the importance of a multilateral approach to solving this issue.

He feared that the notion of a pre-emptive strike, advanced by the US against possible acts of terror, would cause political chaos in the world because many countries would mount attacks on their neighbours.

Any decision to mount a military action against Iraq should not be taken by only two countries, he told a press conference here, stressing again the key role of the United Nations to ensure peace and stability in the world.

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## Sanctions must be lifted now, says Dr M

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Dr Mahathir said he disagreed with the use of sanctions on Iraq because the people, especially the vulnerable, would suffer.

"Why should we punish the sick, the poor and the children for the government they have and which they did not choose?

"It is not a democratic government. So why punish the people?" he asked.

He also said that sanctions must be lifted now that Iraq had agreed to readmit UN weapons inspectors.

To a question by an Arab journalist, Dr Mahathir said the Israeli siege of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat would

cause a great deal of anger in the Islamic world should Arafat become a martyr.

"If you remove Arafat, who is going to replace him? He is the only credible leader of the Palestinian people. If you replace him with someone who is compliant to (Israeli Prime Minister Ariel) Sharon, he'll be rejected or might even be assassinated."

Asked whether he was still sceptical about the Asem process, which he expressed in London last Saturday, Dr Mahathir said Asem could not do "very much" on issues such as the decision to attack Iraq, but the grouping was making progress on other matters.

Though Iraq was not on the agenda of the two-day summit, which ended yesterday, the threat of war overshadowed Asem 4, highlighting the European and Asian leaders' differences with the United States.

Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji, at an earlier press conference, also warned of "severe consequences" if the United States, with the support of Britain, attacked Iraq without a UN mandate, echoing the sentiments of the summit leaders.

Dr Mahathir said the discussions over the last two days were open, frank and positive, and action was being planned to further strengthen ties between Europe and Asia,

such as social development, setting up more training centres on human resources.

On the euro, Dr Mahathir said the single currency had not yet lived up to the expectations of the Europeans though it had regained some ground vis-à-vis the US dollar. But whether "it is going to stay or remain strong" was left to be seen.

"It is important to have an alternative currency to the US dollar; but there is a tendency for goods sold in the euro to be converted into the US dollar. Basically, it shows that the euro is not standing on its own just yet," he said.

The next Asem summit in 2004 will be held in Hanoi.