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Mahathir-Australia

DR MAHATHIR SLAMS AUSTRALIA FOR SUPPORTING U.S.WAR EFFORT

By: Neville D'Cruz

MELBOURNE, Nov 24 (Bernama) -- Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has said Australia "has gone too far" in identifying itself with the United States' aims and tactics in the war on terror.

In an interview with Greg Sheridan, foreign editor of "The Australian" newspaper, Dr Mahathir said, "Australia has to choose whether it's an Asian country or a Western country."

"If you (Australia) take the position of being a sheriff, or deputy sheriff, to America, you cannot very well be accepted by the countries of this region."

"Australia is more belligerent than many European countries. You have never criticised any of the acts of the Americans. Even to the point where the Americans want to go off on their own and attack Iraq. Australia seems to be with the Americans."

Asked by Sheridan whether this would cause long-term damage for Australia, Dr Mahathir said: "You will never be accepted. You will always be regarded as an outsider."

Dr Mahathir was equally tough on the US.

"I don't think the US is winning (the war on terror). I don't think so because this is the kind of war that can last for ages."

The Prime Minister thinks the US has gone backwards politically in the past 14 months.

"I would say the situation is worse than it was immediately after the bombings on September 11. The day after the bombings, the whole world, including the Muslim world united to fight terrorism."

Dr Mahathir said the US had alienated much Muslim opinion and Muslims feel "it's not a campaign against terrorists, but against Muslims."

He said the US should not only address terrorism as a security problem but also address its root causes.

"It's not Islam at all," he said.

"The Palestinian issue is basic, but of course the decision of the US to keep its troops in Saudi Arabia after the Gulf War was the direct cause of Osama bin Laden's actions."

Dr Mahathir said the US must act to settle the Palestinian-Israeli dispute.

"The Palestinian issue is the major cause of all this. The Palestinians lost their land. Their land was given to the Jews to create Israel and they were forced from their own houses, expelled from their land and forced to become refugees."

-- BERNAMA

NDC AZZ AAM