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Media `trying to promote war in Middle East with provocative reporting'

PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - The international media is trying to fuel a war in the Middle East through lop-sided and provocative reporting, the Prime Minister said today.

"I think they are stoking the fires of war," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said. He had been asked to comment on the concern expressed by certain quarters around the world at the role of the international media in "promoting war" rather than enhancing world peace.

Dr Mahathir said the international media seemed bent on contributing to greater animosity so that (when war broke out) there would be lots of things for them to report.

"Then you get to watch on BBC, CNN, daily reports in realtime about the fighting and then they will become heroes. How journalists are killed when they go to these areas."

He was speaking at a Press conference after attending the monthly staff assembly and the opening of the Ministry of Finance Complex.

Dr Mahathir also said the UN should consider lifting the sanctions against Iraq if it allowed UN weapons inspectors in.

"The first thing they should do is to ask Saddam Hussein to let the inspectors go in, and then reduce the sanctions against Iraq because sanctions do not hurt Saddam.

"Sanctions only hurt the poor people of Iraq including those who are sick, old and babies. These people are paying the price ...they were not responsible for whatever is being done by Iraq," he said.

Asked by reporters if the UN should also review the unilaterally imposed "no-fly zone" in Iraq as the policing was never approved by the world body, he said: "That is the problem. Double standards. On one hand they say we should follow international rules, and on the other if the rules are not beneficial they ignore it."

The Prime Minister reiterated his view that the fight against terrorism would take a longer time if the US and Britain continued to fuel the hatred of Muslims by attacking Iraq.

"We want to prevent them from inciting such feelings but if they attack Saddam even those who are not on good terms with Iraq, like Saudi Arabia and Egypt will oppose," Dr Mahathir said, adding that apart from Britain no other nation supported the US intention to attack Iraq.

"It will lengthen the period of anti-terrorist fighting. We know because we fought the terrorists for 42 years before we could defeat them. It is not easy.

"In the daytime they may be selling vegetables to you (but) at night they become terrorists. They may be your neighbour today, the next day they might blow themselves up from an aeroplane," he said, describing the complexity of an anti-terrorism campaign.

Dr Mahathir has repeatedly said in the post-Sept 11 period that any attempt to eradicate terrorism must start by identifying the root causes of the scourge and not by retaliation.