

19 JUL 2002

Mahathir-Iraq

MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAQ UNDEMOCRATIC, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, July 19 (Bernama) -- The US's intention to use military action against Iraq to oust its president, Saddam Hussein, is wrong, unjust and undemocratic, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"We don't think other governments have a right, no matter how powerful they are, to change the government of another country. That is an undemocratic thing to do," he said in response to a question from the floor at the International Forum on Islam, here.

He was asked what was the likely impact on Malaysia's continuous efforts to promote a modest and forward-looking Islam, if the Bush administration were to move its armed forces towards Iraq.

US President George W. Bush had said that Washington would use all the tools at its disposal to topple Saddam.

Dr Mahathir said a military force against Iraq would only provoke greater hatred as the US's quarrel was with Saddam, whom it had branded as a dictator, and not the people of Iraq.

"It's up to the people (of Iraq) to change their government if they can, but they cannot. But because they cannot, it's not fair to punish them," he said.

The prime minister questioned why the US had picked on Iraq when there are other countries in the world which also deserve a change in government.

"But when you focus on Iraq, the people who will suffer are the hapless people of Iraq. Then of course you are going to arouse a lot of ill-feelings and in Malaysia, we think that it is the wrong thing to do," he said.

To a question on how the Muslims deal with the Palestinian issue, Dr Mahathir said the matter was not a religious problem but a territorial one.

He said history had shown that Muslims and Jews could live together, in fact the Jews invariably migrated to Islamic countries whenever they were oppressed and massacred in Europe.

"In Muslim countries, they are respected and their faith honoured as Muslims believe that they can live and eat with the Jews as they slaughter in the Muslim way by mentioning the name of God," said Dr Mahathir.

But when the Jews took Palestinians' land by force, the conflicts between Muslims and the Jews started, he said.

"The fighting between the Muslims and the Jews has escalated and it will escalate for as long as Palestinians are deprived of their territory," he added.

To another question, the prime minister said Muslims in Southeast Asia could work, cooperate and live with the non-Muslims better than their Muslim brothers in the Arab world.

This was because of the racial and religious mix in this region whereas in the Arab countries, the people were predominantly Muslims, thus reducing their ability to interact with the non-Muslims, he said.

Asked whether the concept of Muslim ummah was still relevant now, he said that despite Muslims being split according to their national territories, "on certain issues we actually feel and act more or less together."

"We all feel very angry about Palestine for example, but we don't agree about how we should handle this problem," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that with Muslims' failure to deal with issues affecting the ummah, Muslims had actually lost their influence on world

affairs.

"But there is still a Muslim ummah because when something happens in Bosnia, for example, there was a feeling of empathy, feeling of oneness with them."

"So, to that extent, I think the concept of the ummah is still alive," Dr Mahathir added.

-- BERNAMA

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