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Mahathir-Iraq

NO PLAN FOR MALAYSIA TO BE MEDIATOR IN US-IRAQ ROW

PULAU PANGKOR, Sept 8 (Bernama) -- Malaysia has no intention to act as a mediator in the dispute between the United States and Iraq, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"We can't handle that...it's too big a thing," he said when asked whether Malaysia, being a moderate Muslim country, will play a mediator's role similar to that in Myanmar.

In the case of Myanmar, Malaysia was invited, Dr Mahathir said when answering a question from the floor after delivering his closing address at the Asian Global Leadership Forum, here.

Following Malaysia's diplomatic effort and negotiations carried out by the country's former envoy, Tan Sri Razali Ismail, who is the special envoy of the United Nations secretary-general, the Myanmar military junta lifted restrictions on opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi on May 6 this year.

The United States and its close ally, Britain, which have been threatening to attack Iraq and oust President Saddam Hussein, sent 12 aircraft to a major Iraqi air defence installation west of Baghdad two days ago, increasing the possibility of a war.

Dr Mahathir said the US and Britain should instead work on finding a solution through peaceful means rather than provoking Muslims worldwide.

He said that during the Gulf War where US-led multinational forces attacked Iraq to free Kuwait, many West Asian countries supported the move and allowed the use of their bases.

"But the same countries that allowed their bases to be used and cooperated with US are now against any move to attack Iraq. Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia may not like Saddam but they don't want Iraq to be attacked," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that to fight terrorism, the US should not aggravate the situation by provocation but should listen to the views of the world, especially the Muslims.

On protests over the deportation of illegal workers from Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would stick to its decision to send back those who came to the country illegally.

He said the move did not only affect Indonesians and Filipinos but also illegals from other countries like Bangladesh, India and Myanmar.

"Some of them came here illegally and robbed and killed our people. We have to protect our people and we have the right to do that," he added.

The government, however, would continue to allow foreign workers who come here legally with proper documents as it would be easier to control them and there were sectors who needed their services.

He said Malaysia also believed in prospering its neighbours as this would help to develop its lesser developed neighbours, create more jobs and stop the influx of illegal workers into the country.

-- BERNAMA

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