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US threat to topple Saddam wrong and unjust, says PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the United States' threat of military aggression to topple Iraqi president Saddam Hussein is wrong, unjust and undemocratic.

"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 during the dialogue session at the Kuala Lumpur International Forum on Islam, here.

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, Dr Mahathir said such action would only provoke greater hatred towards the US.

He said the US was unhappy with Saddam and not with the people of Iraq.

"It is up to the people of Iraq to change their government if they can. It is not fair to punish them if they cannot," he said.

Dr Mahathir also questioned why the US had picked on Iraq when there were numerous other countries in the world which also deserved a change in government.

"When you focus on Iraq, the ones who will suffer are the helpless 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, expressing Kuala Lumpur's stand over the issue.

On the Middle East crisis, he said, the matter was not a religious problem as often portrayed but a territorial dispute.