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Mahathir-War

US WAR ON IRAQ A MATTER OF TIME, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: Salbiah Said

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, Oct 12 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he believes that it is only a matter of time before the United States wages a war on Iraq.

"US President George W. Bush is pushed into a corner. He has committed himself and he wants to do this," the prime minister said in reply to a question on the impact of a war in Iraq at a dialogue with the Malaysian community in Brunei. He is on a two-day working visit here.

He said a war with Iraq would mean that Malaysia's trade with the US would be affected.

As it was now, trade with the US was already affected after the Sept 11 attack on Pentagon and this was further worsened in the US homeground, which was saddled with a host of corporate and banking scandals, he said.

"Already the US is not buying Malaysian goods, with production of microchips from Malaysia to the US being also affected.

"War will affect the whole world. If there's war, all costs will increase. Trade is important to us.

"In war, trade is not good. The US has pushed us into a corner. At the same time, trade with the Middle East will also be hampered by the Iraq War," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that although in the early days when Malaysia was producing rubber and tin, it was able to sell more of its primary products during the Korean War, today the goods produced by Malaysia were different.

A war in Iraq would mean that demand for Malaysia's products would be reduced. At the same time, prices would go up, transportation would be difficult and insurance costs would rise.

"In my view, America has pushed itself into a corner. There is no way they can get out of it (the war). They think they are doing a very short war. They have turned Iraqis into nothingness.

As the US did not want to fight on the ground, its soldiers would be killed, as was the case in Afghanistan, he said.

"They used airplanes to bomb and rocket everything. On the ground, they got the British and the French to fight, and now they have only the British to fight. Good luck to them," he added.

"We have protested against this because we feel any war against Iraq will not help in the removal of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, but will create more anger and suffering for the Iraqis. Already they are suffering. I don't really look forward to this at all."

Malaysia, he said, was trying to reduce its trade dependence on the US by increasing trade within Asean.

"Since the Asean countries are away from the main theatre of war, we hope to at least reduce the impact of war by having intra-Asean trade," he said.

On foreign wire reports on the mandate given by the US Congress empowering President Bush to make a unilateral decision in waging a war on Iraq, Dr Mahathir said that it was the right of the US Congress to do so.

"What should be the right of the United Nations is that it should ensure that such actions must obtain the approval of the UN but the United Nations is not united, with differences in views and opinions," he said at a news conference at Istana Darut Taqwa.

The UN did not have any powers, including the military force to stop the US from taking a unilateral action against Iraq, but would stop a small

country like Malaysia from waging war against another country, and by virtue of their size, small countries were weak compared to countries like the US.

"We are talking about the biggest power in the world...this is what you call might is right," he said.

In the Islamic context, Dr Mahathir said Islamic countries should stand united and not opt out of the UN, referring to recent developments which saw the international body losing its powers in stopping the US from using its unilateral decision against Iraq.

"Opting out would mean Islamic countries would lose their own powers as members. If we had not been in the United Nations, the international body could have supported the decision made by the US to attack Iraq then....and we would all be disappointed," said Dr Mahathir.

"Muslims today are weak as they are divided and not united, although Islam teaches them to promote solidarity. As such, we become weak and oppressed," he said.

In terms of military strength, Islamic countries were weak and this stemmed from the lack of unity and solidarity among them, he said.

"The question of money does not arise. A lot of money owned by Islamic countries are kept in the US and they are also being invested and may have been used for purchasing arms which are financed by Israel," he added.

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