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Mahathir-Iraq

DR MAHATHIR CONDEMNS ASSASSINATION PLOT TO SOLVE PROBLEMS

KUALA LUMPUR, March 21 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said the world is now facing a frightening situation where a major power which is considered to be highly civilised -- clearly referring to the United States (US) -- resorts to assassination of another world leader to achieve its goal.

The Prime Minister said this showed the declining morals of the world's major powers including Britain, Spain and the US in condoning assassination as a weapon of national policy.

In his first reaction after the attacks on Iraq by the US and its allies which started yesterday to overthrow President Saddam Hussein, he said: "This is frightening because we don't know who will become the victims.

"We can no longer feel safe if we make any mistake, then there will be an assassination," he told a media conference after chairing the Umno Supreme Council meeting, here.

Reiterating that Malaysia strongly opposed the attacks on Iraq, Dr Mahathir said the act by the US, which ignored the United Nations (UN), was something that destroyed the international system in resolving conflicts.

Dr Mahathir, who is on vacation, said he chaired the Council meeting at the request of his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi although he initially intended to attend the meeting as an ordinary member.

He returned home yesterday after a four-day visit to Brazil and was expected to watch the Formula One (F1) race at Sepang International Circuit (SIC) on Sunday, probably the last for him as Prime Minister following his decision to retire in October.

Dr Mahathir said it was common knowledge that the US had labelled Iraq together with Iran and North Korea as the Axis of Evil and being ruled by dictators.

"Maybe after (the attack on) Iraq, Iran, and after Iran, probably Syria or Libya. These countries are accused of being under dictatorships and the intention of the US government is (supposedly) to free the people (of these countries) from the dictatorships," he said.

He said by starting the attack on Iraq without UN endorsement, the US had ignored the existence of the world body which had all this while been the protector of the weak nations.

"Now, we can no longer depend on the UN if the major powers intend to attack us. We may be found guilty as the hangman is also the judge," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the US had also frequently emphasised on the need for other countries to obey the rule of law but the country itself did not do so as was demonstrated when it rejected several international agreements involving the climate and the establishment of the international criminal court.

At the same time, he said the government would present a resolution on the US attack on Iraq at the current Parliament sitting.

"I hope the debate will focus on this problem and will not be distracted by other matters. The objective is to determine the stand of the people of Malaysia from all parties with regard to what was being done to Iraq," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the resolution was drawn up to express the Malaysians' opposition against the war and that they were against the attack on the

West Asian nation aimed at killing its president.

"In this matter, we feel that the government and the opposition parties should have a common stand. We should be united. Although we have our differences, in this matter...we all oppose the attack on Iraq," he said.

In addition, Dr Mahathir said the conflict in Iraq should not be regarded as a war between Christians and Muslims.

"There is no crusade," he said, adding that many Christians including Pope John Paul and other Christian leaders opposed the attack on Iraq.

"We hope that although it (Iraq) is a Muslim country, the act is not because they want to attack a Muslim country. But we fear, eventually the targets are Muslim countries," he said.

Replying to a question, Dr Mahathir said he did not think the UN could stop the war but the US must be told that its action was against wishes of other member countries of the UN.

"We also need to remind the US on the crime in terms of the legality of its war against Iraq so that later on, if they want to say that we don't have an administration that adheres to the law, we can show them that what they are doing (is something) even worse," he said.

As chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Dr Mahathir said he had sent a letter to all members of the UN Security Council on the issue over Iraq.

He also reminded Malaysians intending to demonstrate against the war in Iraq to do it in an orderly manner.

He said the government would also ensure that prices of goods did not escalate due to the war in West Asia besides studying the actions that should be taken to ensure that national security was preserved.

Replying to another question, he said Malaysia was ready to study the dispatch of humanitarian aid such as food and clothings to help war victims in Iraq.

The supreme council meeting also discussed issues on the sekolah agama rakyat (SAR) and the secondary schools including the measures that must be taken to attract students from the other races to enrol into national schools.

Dr Mahathir hoped the opposition would put aside any differences with the government concerning the SAR issue in debating the motion on Iraq at the Parliament sitting soon.

At the start of the media conference, the Umno president when explaining his presence, had called on the media not to speculate that he was trying to take over Abdullah's role as Acting Prime Minister during Dr Mahathir's vacation.

"This (my presence) does not mean there are problems between him and me. Don't say that I came back to take over because I don't trust (him) or naything like that, not at all.

"Don't write nonsense," he added.

-- BERNAMA

MAM AZH AO