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Mahathir-Iraq

DR MAHATHIR URGES UN TO TAKE FULL CONTROL OF IRAQ

By: Mokhtar Hussein

ALGIERS, Aug 12 (Bernama) -- Malaysia has on Monday urged the United Nations (UN) to immediately take full control of the situation in Iraq, fearing that the country is likely to descend into anarchy.

"The Iraqis must regain their independence soonest," Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said during his three-day official visit to Algeria.

He said Malaysia would like a return to the multilateral system in achieving world peace through the UN especially in solving the problem in Iraq.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at a state dinner hosted by Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika at the "Palais Du Peuple" (Palace of the People).

The Prime Minister, who arrived here Sunday evening, is leading a 127-member delegation comprising senior ministers and businessmen aimed at building a strong partnership with the northern African nation.

Dr Mahathir, who has been an outspoken critic against the United States (US)-led invasion of Iraq, made the remarks following recent international concerns on the Iraqi situation especially the inability of the US forces in administering the country.

The remarks came several days before his scheduled official visit to Damascus on Aug 16 where talks with Syrian President Dr Bashar Al-Assad is expected to touch on situation in neighbouring Iraq.

Shortly before travelling to Algiers, Dr Mahathir had called on the international community during a World Peace Conference in Kuala Lumpur to reject war and return to sanity.

On terrorism, Dr Mahathir said Muslim countries must unite to defend the image of Islam which had been portrayed as a religion that promotes acts of terror.

"Malaysia continues to believe that a universally accepted definition of terrorism is vital to enable the international community to take a concerted and effective action against terrorism. The cause of terrorism must also be attended to," he said.

Terrorism has also been a major concern now in Southeast Asia following terror attacks in Indonesia especially in the wake of the recent bomb blast at the J.W. Marriot Hotel in Jakarta which killed 14 people.

On bilateral ties, Dr Mahathir said both countries shared a common destiny and aspired to be developed and for the people to prosper.

However he said to achieve economic development was not easy and required hard work, determination and proper planning.

"Malaysia is ready to share what little experience it has in developing and managing its economy with fellow developing countries," he said, referring to a study on the diversification of Algeria's economy which has been prepared by the Economic Planning Unit (EPU), submitted to the Algerian government earlier this year.

"This is only a small contribution that my Government could offer to friendly countries like Algeria," Dr Mahathir said.

Saying that his visit was to further reaffirm Malaysia's commitment to the spirit of friendship and cooperation, the Prime Minister said: "We must work together to lift our relations to a new and more meaningful height".

Apart from the existing cooperation between Petronas and the Algerian national oil company, Sonatrach, in the oil and gas industry, Malaysia and Algeria were also looking into possibility of exploring potential sectors

including the Information and Communications Technology (ICT), construction, education and tourism.

In terms of bilateral trade, Dr Mahathir said statistics of the last few years have shown an upward trend with last year's trade amounting to about US\$100 million (RM380 million).

"This figure is marginal and does not reflect the true potential of our trade. I believe much more can be done. The private sectors of both our countries must engage themselves more aggressively and work on establishing mutually profitable trade ties.

"Distance should not be an impediment to better interactions between people and the business community. Direct trading should also be encouraged rather than through a third country".

In his speech, President Bouteflika also stressed the need for an accurate definition of terrorism "in order not to harm the people's" legitimate rights to self-determination or to resist foreign occupation.

"We also continue to warn against tendentious assimilation of terrorism to a religion, a civilization, a region or a country," he said.

He also suggested that the Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism, which had been established in Malaysia, to engage into close cooperation with the African Study and Research Centre on Terrorism which the African Union had decided to set up in Algiers.

The President praised Malaysia's initiative in promoting dialogues among cultures and civilisations to eliminate prejudices and restore the true image of Islam.

"Promoting such a dialogue is a source of satisfaction for us, because your experience bears ample proof that economic and technological progress, democracy and modernity are not in contradiction with keeping to our Muslim identity and traditions," he added.

-- BERNAMA
MOK MFJ ZUL