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Mahathir-Israel

ISRAEL WANTS U.S. TO START A NEW WAR IN WEST ASIA - DR M

PUTRAJAYA, Oct 11 (Bernama) -- Israel is egging the US to start a new war in West Asia by invading Syria, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"Israel has been urging America to invade Syria, but America seems to be reluctant. So, in order to force the hands of America, Israel is going to invade Syria.

"When that happens, the Americans will have to support Israel due to domestic political reasons that make Jewish votes a major factor in its presidential election," he said when asked to comment on the recent Israeli attack on Syria.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir opened Malaysia's first mega Research and Development laboratory, InventQjaya Sdn Bhd, here.

Last Sunday, Israel mounted a surprise aerial attack on what it claimed as a Palestinian training base in Syria.

US President George Bush defended Israel's decision to attack Syria, saying it had the right to defend herself.

Asked whether the attack on Syria should be raised at the United Nations (UN), Dr Mahathir said: "We can bring it up at the UN level but the question is what can the UN do."

On the Non-Aligned Movement's (NAM) stand on such a situation, he said NAM had always been condemning such things but it was unable to go beyond that stage.

"So, I can say, I condemn, I condemn, I condemn but that's all," he said. Malaysia is the current chairman of the 117-member NAM.

Asked what else could be done rather than just condemning, he said: "We can go to war but we have no capacity to go to war. That's the problem because we allow ourselves to become weak, people bully us."

On whether the 10th Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit would come up with specific resolutions on Syria's situation, Dr Mahathir said: "We'll see about it."

The summit began today with the Senior Officials Meeting to prepare the agenda for the ministerial meeting on Monday and Tuesday. The OIC leaders will meet on Thursday and Friday.

On issues to be discussed at the summit, Dr Mahathir said it would be on the present situation of the Islamic world and its people.

Asked about the message the OIC countries would want to convey to Russian President Vladimir Putin, he said Putin had been invited as a special guest.

"Well, he will listen to the views expressed and I don't know what they (member countries) are going to say. We are inviting him because we want him to know what Islam is all about, what the Muslims are like."

During his visit to Malaysia in August, Putin requested Russia be part of the OIC as it had a substantial number of Muslim population.

Besides Putin, Philippine President Gloria Arroyo would also attend the summit as a special guest.

On other matters, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia needs to set up a commission or a committee of experts to oversee the damage caused due to Singapore's reclamation works in the Straits of Johor.

Singapore had carried out reclamation works covering 5,215 hectares of sea. The project is expected to be completed by 2010.

The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) in Hamburg,

Germany, in its ruling on Wednesday, ordered both sides to cooperate and consult in establishing a group of independent experts and establish the mechanism for the exchange of information on the reclamation.

Dr Mahathir was also asked on Malaysia's future bilateral relations with Australia following the remarks by Prime Minister John Howard that he would not "dignify" criticisms from Dr Mahathir as he (Dr Mahathir) would be stepping down on Oct 31.

Dr Mahathir said: "I leave it to my successor."

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