

17 FEB 2003

Mahathir (Declaration)

KL DECLARATION TO CONTAIN ANTI-WAR STANCE, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 17 (Bernama) -- The Kuala Lumpur Declaration to be issued at the end of the 13th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit here will, among others, contain anti-war sentiments shared by the movement's leaders, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

When asked to give a hint on the content of the declaration, the prime minister said: "(It will) certainly (be) about our anti-war stance that war is not a solution to international conflict."

He was speaking at a media conference after witnessing the rehearsal for the opening of the summit at the Putra World Trade Centre here. The Feb 24-25 summit is preceded by the senior officials meeting on Feb 20 and 21, and the ministerial meeting on Feb 22.

Dr Mahathir said the meeting would also focus on the argument that war should not be an instrument to settle disputes between nations.

Asked to comment on what appeared to be a softening stand by the United States and Britain on their plans to attack Iraq, he said: "But we want to see how soft is a soft stance."

It was reported that both the US and Britain were now taking a softer stance in the drafting of a resolution to be presented to the United Nations (UN) seeking authorisation to use force against Baghdad following massive anti-war protests by millions of people worldwide over the weekend.

Some of the largest demonstrations were held in countries whose leaders have backed US President George W. Bush's call for war to disarm Iraq.

Dr Mahathir said he expected the US and Britain to stick to their plan to attack Iraq even if UN arms inspectors failed to find weapons of mass destruction in that country or any reason to justify an attack.

"What mystifies us is that they adopt an attitude that if they do not find weapons of mass destruction, that means Iraq is hiding them. So it is very difficult.

"So, whichever way, Iraq is going to get it because if they (UN inspectors) do not find them (weapons of mass destruction), it must be hiding (such weapons). I cannot understand this."

Thus, Dr Mahathir said, Iraq would be put in a position where it would have to "produce (proof that it has) some weapons of mass destruction" if the country wanted to avoid war.

He said that even if the inspection by the UN arms inspectors were to be extended for another one or two years, the US and Britain would be bent on ensuring that such weapons would be eventually found in Iraq.

"But there is evidence that Iraq has destroyed most of the weapons of mass destruction that it had, which had been identified by the previous inspectorate," he added.

-- BERNAMA

MAD MAM JK