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MAHATHIR-IRAQ

MAHATHIR: US & BRITAIN HAVE DUTY TO REBUILD IRAQ AFTER DESTROYING IT

By: Yong Soo Heong & Mikhail Raj Abdullah

PUTRAJAYA, April 18 (Bernama) -- The United States and Britain have a duty to help restore Iraq's economy since they have destroyed it through their recent invasion, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"They know how to destroy Iraq, so they must know how to reconstruct it," he said in an interview with Bernama at Seri Perdana here today.

Malaysia, he said, would not be involved in rebuilding the Iraqi economy except in providing aid like food and medicines, medical help and perhaps some business.

"We (Malaysia) cannot rebuild their economy. Their economy has been destroyed by the coalition (between the United States and Britain). It is the coalition's duty to restore the economy," said Dr Mahathir, who is still on leave and had just come back from an overseas vacation in Latin America and Japan.

Asked whether the Iraqi war was warranted, the prime minister said it was not.

He added, "Whether they (the coalition forces) find the weapons (of mass destruction), the war is not warranted because we don't believe that killing people is a way of solving problems."

"If you believe that killing people is a way of solving problems, then of course the most powerful nation can solve its problems very easily by killing others," he said in an apparent reference to the United States which had led the invasion into Iraq on March 20 together with its strongest ally, Britain.

The war has resulted in the deaths of between 1,600 and 1,900 Iraqi civilians. Some 2,300 Iraqi military personnel were reported to have died in Baghdad alone. An estimated 5,100 people Iraqis have also been wounded in the attacks.

As for the United States, 125 of its soldiers have been killed while the death casualty among the British armed forces is 30.

Asked about moves by the United States to attack Syria for allegedly harbouring loyalists of Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, Dr Mahathir said this was the Americans' so-called war against terrorism.

"They cannot hit at the terrorists, so they hit all these Muslim countries so that they (Muslim countries) would be frightened and would not allow any terrorist to get their support or seek asylum. That's the way they want to fight."

Dr Mahathir said the muscle-flexing by the United States was to show other countries that "they are dealing with a very powerful nation which will do anything."

This, he said, meant that the world had become a unilateral one where "one power had become so powerful that it dominates everything and that power is not shy about using force in order to get its way."

"That is the world we live in today, we have to learn to accept that," he lamented.

Dr Mahathir said even developed countries like France, Germany and Russia would feel the pressure. These three countries had opposed the use of force on Iraq if it was not sanctioned by the United Nations.

"Already we see some weakening (of positions on their part) and a desire to "kow-tow" (or servile respect) to the most powerful nation in the world," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who had repeatedly advocated finding the root causes of terrorism in order to address the menace head-on, was asked why the United States had not heeded his suggestion.

The prime minister, who had previously said there must be compelling reasons for people to plunge airplanes into buildings or become suicide bombers, said the United States did not think about resolving the terrorism problem along those lines.

"What they think they should do is to really beat up all these countries so that they won't have anybody who dares to carry out any terrorist activity because if they do then all the countries will be smashed to pieces, their governments would be changed, their countries would be invaded. If terrorists were to kill one person, they are prepared to kill 1,000," he added.

Asked what lessons can developing countries, including Malaysia, learn from the invasion of Iraq, Dr Mahathir said they have to learn to be disciplined and work harder to develop countries and not to be too dependent on others. -- BERNAMA

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