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MAHATHIR-PETRONAS

MAHATHIR: PETRONAS'S CEO SECONDMENT TO IRAQ ONLY IF REQUEST COMES FROM UN

By: Mikhail Raj Abdullah & Yong Soo Heong

PUTRAJAYA, April 18 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will consider seconding Petronas president and chief executive officer Tan Sri Mohd Hassan Merican to help manage Iraq's oil industry only if a request comes from the United Nations, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"At the moment, this is not a proposal. It is just an opinion expressed by two newspapers, so we don't even think about it," he told Bernama when asked to comment on news reports that Hassan might be approached to help in the reconstruction of Iraq's war-torn oil industry.

"Such an offer should only come from the United Nations, failing which, we don't even want to think of it," he said.

Two British newspapers, The Financial Times and The Independent, recently reported that the head of Malaysia's national oil corporation might be a possible candidate to help manage the oil industry in post-war Iraq.

Iraq holds more than 112 billion barrels of oil, the world's second largest proven oil reserves in the world behind Saudi Arabia. The Iraqis also have 110 trillion cu. ft of natural gas.

Asked whether Petronas could explore business opportunities in Iraq, Dr Mahathir said that the national oil corporation had been trying to move into Iraq a long time ago.

"But today, the situation is different, we don't even know who runs Iraq. We know the Iraqis are not running their own country. so we cannot get into it," he said.

A Petronas official spokesperson, commenting on the news report at midweek, said the national oil corporation had not been approached by the US Administration on the matter.

Given that Petronas is government-owned, the spokesperson also said "any decision (on the appointment) will require the approval of the Government of Malaysia."

Both newspapers said the Bush Administration is looking for an experienced oil executive from a Muslim country for the job.

Another potential candidate is Algeria's oil minister, Chakib Khelil.

Mohd Hassan has been Petronas president and CEO since February 1995.

Established in 1974, the national oil corporation was vested with managing Malaysia's entire oil and gas resources.

It operates in 34 countries today with international businesses accounting for over 80 percent of its revenue. Petronas has also been hailed as the most profitable and efficiently-run government-owned oil company in the world. -- BERNAMA

MR/SHY SHY

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