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Mahathir-Iraq

M'SIA NOT CONVINCED OF US CLAIM OF IRAQ'S LINK WITH AL QAEDA

ALOR GAJAH, Jan 30 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that he is not convinced of the United States' claim that there is clear evidence linking Iraq and the Al Qaeda.

"We are not convinced yet and can't accept, and even the world has yet to accept," he told a news conference after opening a Japanese car plant.

"No, we're not anti-America. If they convince us, we will go along with them just as in the case of the fight against terrorism. We are willing to cooperate fully with them," he said.

In his annual State of the Union speech to Congress and the American people, US President George W. Bush said that the US has new intelligence on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and also that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein "aids and protects terrorists" including members of the Al Qaeda.

Bush said that Secretary of State Colin Powell would be sent to the UN Security Council on Feb 5 to reveal these alleged crimes.

On Singapore's move to make public letters and documents on the water deal between the republic and Malaysia, he said that it shows a lack of faith.

"The facts are not correct and I think it is not nice to publicise letters which were written in confidence. It shows a lack of faith," he told reporters after opening a factory here.

He was commenting on the Singapore government's decision to release documents including the 1927, 1961 and 1962 water agreements and letters over two years between leaders of both countries on the issue.

Singapore Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar said on Sunday that he was releasing the documents because the issue was "no longer realistic and so much information on the water issue had been put out by Malaysia that needs to be rebutted by conclusive evidence."

Dr Mahathir said that it was difficult for Malaysia now to write letters to the republic.

"It is very difficult now for us to write letters at all because we might as well negotiate through the press," he said.

He said that Malaysia was always ready to discuss the water issue.

"We are always ready to talk but this is not about the price of water. This is about the sovereignty of Singapore. I don't understand," Mahathir said.

"In any case, Malaysia is not a country that goes to war for territorial gains," he said.

Meanwhile, asked to clarify further his statement that it would be good if Umno representatives offered to resign so that his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi could form his own line-up, Dr Mahathir said that he had not asked them to resign now, but it was for the next general election.

"I am not asking them to resign now...I said resign and leave it to the new leader to pick his men.

"But everybody should be willing (to resign) to allow the new leader to pick his own men," he said.

Asked whether it applies to Cabinet members as well, he said:

"Everybody...for the next election."

-- BERNAMA

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