

17 OCT 2003

Mahathir-Syria

MUSLIM COUNTRIES ARE DUTY BOUND TO HELP SYRIA- DR MAHATHIR

PUTRAJAYA, Oct 17 (Bernama) -- Muslim countries are duty-bound to help Syria should the United States impose sanctions against the country, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"As far as we are concerned if sanctions are applied against Syria, then we feel we are duty-bound to help Syria and I think it will be good thing if all Muslim countries can help Syria in trade and other areas," said the Prime Minister.

He was asked on the United States House of Representatives vote to impose sanctions on Syria "until the country has stopped sponsoring terrorism and halted programmes for weapons of mass destruction (WMD)".

Speaking at a press conference at the end of the 10th Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit at the Putrajaya Convention Centre here, he said Israel's attack on Syria was now legitimised as the act received support from the whole US Congress.

"The Congress supported the Jewish pre-emptive attack on Syria on the excuse that Syria has been harbouring terrorists," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the last time the US invaded Iraq on the pretext that the country had WMD but until now no such weapon had been found.

"But they still maintain they have the right to invade Iraq. So excuses can be made at anytime and you can say Syria is harbouring terrorists.

"Maybe Iran wants to build a nuclear bomb or Lebanon has a leader who is not liked by them. Any kind of excuse is nuts. Even if is not true it doesn't matter," he said.

The Prime Minister said in the case of Iraq, the US still maintained that it had the right to attack Iraq even after it had been proven that Iraq did not possess WMD.

"Why the excuses. Just attack because you don't like it," he said.

Asked whether the OIC should consider any future attack on any of its members as an attack perpetrated against the organisation, a principle adhered to by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato), he said:

"Already we have considered an attack on one country as an attack on all."

"The only problem, of course we have no capacity to respond. We are weak. We are also divided and people can play around with us simply because they can bully us.

"So, we feel strongly (about this) but there is not much we can do. That is why I proposed (that Muslim countries should) stop and think about some other way,".

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether Malaysia would contribute in the reconstruction of Iraq.

To this he responded, "We are too poor to extend any help. So we will watch how the rich countries help and we will give our contribution proportionately."

-- BERNAMA

JM MKO AAM