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NAM-Mahathir (Iraq)

NAM LEADERS WILL NOT VISIT IRAQ, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 26 (Bernama) -- The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) will not send its leaders to Baghdad to check on the arms inspections being carried out by the United Nations, NAM Chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said last night.

He said the visit was not necessary as the movement was convinced that Iraq was cooperating with the arms inspectors.

"We don't ask to be convinced, other people want to be convinced," he told a press conference at the end of the 13th NAM Summit at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

The Prime Minister said the competent authority to carry out such a task would be the arms inspectors, adding that nobody would take NAM leaders' words if their findings showed that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Baghdad.

Iraqi Vice-President Taha Yassin Ramadan, in his country statement presented at the summit's general debate, had invited NAM to send a "ministerial delegation or a high-ranking delegation" to Iraq to look into Baghdad's cooperation with the weapons inspectors.

Asked whether NAM would consider an attack on Iraq as an attack on NAM and OIC just like the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) principle, Dr Mahathir said:

"Well, of course NAM and OIC are not military alliances, and we actually cannot go to war in case any one of our members is attacked but we can try to get moral support for our stand," he said.

He said moral support was quite effective in the long run, but hoped that there would be no war at all.

The Prime Minister said the 116-member NAM would help Iraq in its reconstruction should the country be attacked.

"After the war people would want to rebuild, so the usual habit of this world is that you destroy then you rebuild it. It is a waste of money," he said.

Iraq, a member of both NAM and OIC, has been threatened with war by the United States and its allies over alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction. Baghdad has denied the charges.

To another question, Dr Mahathir said he did not know whether the six NAM members in the UN Security Council could put up a united stand when voting on the second UN resolution on Iraq to be tabled by the United States and Britain.

The six NAM members are Pakistan, Syria, Angola, Chile, Cameroon and Guinea.

"I don't know whether we can or cannot (garner their support) but if it is necessary we will try but we expect that any decision that is not in favour of certain countries will be vetoed by that country," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia appreciated France's stand in opposing the planned US-led war against Iraq.

"To us, it is a brave thing for France to oppose the US in this matter but I know this doesn't mean that France wants to uphold the government of Iraq. It is because France is concerned about the cost of war in terms of human life," he said.

Dr Mahathir said France was interested in seeing peace in West Asia.

The Prime Minister said NAM was against war, either through multilateral or unilateral actions, as it involved slaughtering people

although the movement was bound by the UN decision.

"We are not for slaughtering people in whatever way, whether it is by dropping bombs or crashing planes into building. We are against war," he said.

Asked whether he expected the US to take note of NAM's anti-war position, Dr Mahathir said he believed the US would take into account such protests all over the world.

"NAM will add to the consensus voiced by people all over the world against the war," he said.

Asked on UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's statement that the world must take note that the anti-war demonstrations were also for Iraq to disarm, Dr Mahathir said the people against whom the demonstrations were made would say the anti-war rally as meaningless.

Dr Mahathir said although it would be an uphill task to convince the superpowers to dismantle their weapons of mass destruction too, NAM would continue to voice out its opposition on the matter.

"If we just keep quiet and let them have their way, obviously they won't even feel guilty or uncomfortable when they have these weapons, or God forbid, when they use these weapons. So, we must continue to demand that everybody should do away with weapons of mass destruction," he said.

Commenting on the latest development where North Korea tested its weapons yesterday, he said the weapons involved were not nuclear weapons.

"Other countries are also testing their weapons, so I suppose just because they are testing weapons doesn't mean that they are declaring war," he said.

On calls by Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat for NAM to send a fact-finding mission to the war-torn country, Dr Mahathir said he welcomed the invitation if it was possible.

"But I am quite sure that Israel will not allow (it), as much as Israel did not allow a fact-finding mission to go to Jenin after the massacre of the people of Jenin," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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