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Mahathir-Iraq (NAM)

NAM WILL BUILD UP PUBLIC OPINION AGAINST WAR, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, March 24 (Bernama) -- Malaysia, as the chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), will try to build up public opinion in all countries around the world including the United States and Britain against the war in Iraq, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said that many people around the world including the Americans and the British were against the unilateral US-led war in Iraq, which has entered its fifth day.

He also quashed the opinion that Malaysia wants to gain something out of its effort to build up public opinion against the war.

"What we need is world peace. If there's peace, Malaysia will prosper but this stupid war which is unnecessary is unduly undermining world economy and measures taken are not going to be as successful as when there's no war," he told reporters at the lobby of Parliament house after tabling a motion to condemn the US-led invasion on Iraq at the Dewan Rakyat here.

Dr Mahathir said that non-governmental bodies and trade unions should also write to their counterparts in the US and Britain and try to persuade their governments from waging war on the helpless Iraqi people, who for the past 12 years had been sanctioned to food and medicines.

Dr Mahathir, who is on two months' leave until May 4, was also asked on his plans to build up public opinion.

Dr Mahathir said that he intends to write personal letters to friends in the US and Britain, including to NGOs and unions.

He said the Western media, especially the Americans, had not been giving the true picture of the world's public opinion.

"For example, when there were demonstrations throughout the world including the one million people in London, the picture given was a demonstration in Baghdad...of course, it doesn't help any.

"We'll try to influence public opinion in Britain and America, so that they will be able to have some influence in their own government," he said.

On whether Malaysia was not afraid of the US, Dr Mahathir said: "Of course, the US is a powerful nation, which a small nation is afraid of".

"They're capable of arm-twisting in many ways, not only through invasion...they can apply sanctions and lots of other things can be done.

"I remember, once I made a remark which was not very well received in the United States, and they started telling Americans not to invest in Malaysia. So we're exposed...we're a weak nation, we can't fight a war, we can't even defend ourselves in case of economic attacks against us, so naturally we're afraid," he said

To a question whether he foresees that Malaysia's firm stand in condemning the US government and its allies would create backlash to the country, the prime minister said it could very well create a backlash.

"But otherwise if we shut up completely, then I think we're not being honourable and honest to ourselves," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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