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Mahathir-Iraq

US PUBLIC OPINION CAN HELP STOP WAR IN IRAQ, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: Mokhtar Hussain

BRASILIA, March 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that public opinion in the United States can help stop their government from going to war against Iraq as proven during the Vietnam War.

"If you remember the Vietnam War, it was public opinion that forced the US government to stop the war," he said.

Therefore, he said, the only thing that the world could do now was to express their views to the American people.

"We can be of the same mind and express our view especially to their own people. Appealing to the (American) government is not worthwhile...American public (opinion) seems to be ambiguous and there is an increasing feeling that the US should not go to war," he told a news conference during his two-day official visit to Brazil where he met President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, here.

The prime minister was asked what developing countries like Malaysia and Brazil can do to stop the US and its allies from attacking Iraq at this late stage.

In the latest development, President George W. Bush has given 48 hours to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to flee Iraq or face war.

Dr Mahathir said that non-governmental organisations in Malaysia and Brazil should use their contacts and connection in the US to influence the American people not to support war. "...then maybe we can force the (US) government to change its mind," he said.

The prime minister said that President Lula had informed him that he had written to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan suggesting a meeting of heads of government which were not represented in the Security Council to get their views on the matter.

Dr Mahathir also warned that history would repeat itself if the US were to go to war without UN sanction.

"As you know, it was (former US) President Woodrow Wilson who promoted the idea of the League of Nations. Subsequently, the Americans withdrew from the League of Nations and that caused the collapse of the League of Nations," he said.

"If the US ignores the views of the UN, then history will repeat itself. This will be disastrous for the world because it means there will be no more consultations in the management of the world," he said.

The prime minister hoped that the US would think seriously of the implications by going ahead with its plan to attack Iraq without the UN sanction.

He reminded that the war would not benefit anybody including the Western nations because "even if they win the war in one day, the after-effect is going to last for a long, long time".

Asked by a Brazilian journalist as to how Brazil could improve its economy, Dr Mahathir suggested that Brazil change its pattern of doing business and not be too dependent on the North countries for trade.

He said that for the past few years, Malaysia had been changing trading partners, and now trade with nations especially in the Middle East, South-East Asia and Latin America under the South-South cooperation.

"The pattern of trade has to be changed. If Brazil and Malaysia were to lead the way, then we can get Mercosur (a free trade area in South America), and Asean countries to increase their trade.

"Then we can prevent the possibility of being dragged down by the countries of the North which seem to be failing at the moment. As far as foreign investments are concerned, there is not much foreign investment today because people are afraid to invest in an unstable world," he said.

To another question, Dr Mahathir said that he had explained to the Brazilian president on how Malaysia managed to come out of the financial crisis.

The prime minister said that the president appeared to be very interested and wanted to know more. He will send a book on how Malaysia managed the crisis to the Financial Advisor to the President.

However, according to Dr Mahathir, the formula used by Malaysia would not be exactly suitable for Brazil just as Malaysia had refused to borrow from the IMF.

Brazil has instead accepted a US\$30 billion (RM114 billion) lifeline from the IMF.

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