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Mahathir-Iraq

M'SIA, FRANCE AGREE IRAQ ISSUE CANNOT BE TACKLED EASILY - DR M

PUTRAJAYA, July 22 (Bernama) -- Malaysia and France agree that the problems besieging Iraq cannot be tackled easily and that the heavily bombarded nation will have a hard time in the near future.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said what was done to oil-rich Iraq, which was attacked by the US-led forces in March to oust the Saddam Hussein regime, was not right before and after the attack.

He said this at a joint press conference with French President Jacques Chirac, who was on a six-hour whirlwind visit to Malaysia today, at the Prime Minister's official residence at Seri Perdana, here.

"I don't know about there being a joint position (on Iraq by the two nations), but we certainly believe that the situation in Iraq is not going to be easily tackled and that Iraq will go through a very difficult period and what has been done to Iraq is wrong both during and after the war," Dr Mahathir said.

To this, Chirac, who was posed with the same question, said: "I fully share the Prime Minister's views. I will not add anything...I have the same views, before, during and after the war."

On Myanmar, Dr Mahathir said the international community might still get a response from the military-ruled country on the release of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

"We may still get a response from Myanmar, but whatever we do, we must not think about invading Myanmar in order to achieve a regime change," he said.

Chirac echoed Dr Mahathir's stand, but went further to say that the French Government was against the Myanmar military government's stand to detain Suu Kyi.

"I do not approve of the attitude of the Myanmar military government and that I favour democracy in Myanmar and that means releasing Aung San Suu Kyi and other political opponents (of the ruling military junta)," Chirac said.

On another note, Dr Mahathir said Chirac's short visit was because the French President was forced to cancel his scheduled visit in February due to the unstable events in West Asia.

"It is very nice of him to stopover in Malaysia. He did this because he should have come here in February on an official visit but because of events in the Middle East, he was not able to make it.

"He (Chirac) says that since his probable official visit will take place only next year, he decided to visit Malaysia while I am still the Prime Minister. That is very kind of him," said Dr Mahathir.

He said during the meeting with Chirac this evening, he had very good discussions on international and bilateral matters and "we have reached agreements on many issues."

-- BERNAMA

MAM SR TS