

10 SEP 2003

Mahathir-UN

UNITED NATIONS WILL BE MORE OF THE SAME, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

PUTRAJAYA, Sept 10 (Bernama) -- Describing the United Nations as a talk shop, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the world body simply has no political will to institute changes to better represent its members.

The Prime Minister said that while the rest of the world were told to become more democratic, the truth was that the most advanced countries were not democratic in matters pertaining to international affairs.

He was asked to comment on UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's statement which slammed the 15-member Security Council as "undemocratic", saying that the body, established immediately after World War Two, reflected an outdated world power structure.

"I do not foresee any changes. I envisage that they (world power) will again sideline the UN because we have granted them veto power. But they themselves do not honour their veto power. So, there's no longer any significance," he said after attending a briefing on preparations for the upcoming Organisation of Islamic Conference Summit here.

On what the UN should be doing to address its weaknesses, Dr Mahathir said: "We know what they should be doing. The question is whether they want to do it. There is no political will to do anything."

Dr Mahathir noted that what Annan said was something that had been voiced by Malaysia since long ago and that it was similar to the content of his first speech delivered at the UN.

He said there was no reason why the world should still be shackled to the outcome of a war that happened 50 years ago.

In the annual report to the General Assembly, Annan said that UN members should look for "radical reform" in the way the UN and other institutions work to cope with war, terrorism, poverty and human rights.

When asked whether the veto power should go, Dr Mahathir said that perhaps the powerful countries would be reluctant to accept this idea but at least the system should be modified.

He said a motion to stop something could be considered if, for example, two permanent Council members plus three other non-permanent members agree to it.

"But at present one country can frustrate 180 other countries. It is very undemocratic for one country, no matter how big, to frustrate 180 other countries," he said.

The United States, which is one of five veto-wielding countries, invaded Iraq without the consent of the UN and against the wishes of other key members.

On whether Muslim countries should be given a permanent seat on the Security Council, Dr Mahathir said the more important thing was that the voice of the developing countries was heard.

To a question, the Prime Minister said that Annan's statement was long overdue.

"It should have been said a long time ago but, anyway, we are happy that he has come round to our views," he said.

On the Palestine issue, Dr Mahathir said there was no future for the so-called "road map" to peace unless the rights of the Palestinians were recognised.

The Israelis, he said, must evacuate from the land that they seized from the Palestinians and that those expelled and their families must be allowed to come back and their land and houses returned to them.

Touching on the reported Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrom (SARS) case in Singapore, Dr Mahathir said that in actual fact the World Health Organisation (WHO) had deemed it as a non-SARS case.

"But unfortunately, as usual, the Western press went to town (with the story) and the share market has suffered as a result, and I am quite sure people are again cancelling their visits to this area.

"Our tourism will be affected -- all because there is one case which we don't know what is the cause of it but it's not SARS according to the WHO," he said.

On his visit to the PCC, Dr Mahathir said that he was satisfied with the overall preparation for the OIC Summit but some aspects needed fine-tuning.

He said several dry runs would be conducted to ensure the smooth-running of the Summit.

Dr Mahathir said that Malaysia's experience in hosting big international events such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) would be documented for future reference.

-- BERNAMA  
MAM MAM RM