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Mahathir-Iraq

UN FORCES SHOULD TAKE OVER CONTROL OF IRAQ, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: Mokhtar Hussain

ALGIERS, Aug 13 (Bernama) -- Malaysia strongly feels that the situation in Iraq can be improved if United Nations forces are allowed to take over control of the country and to pave way for elections to be held to form a new government.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said it was quite obvious that the Iraqis were very much against the occupation by the United States and British forces.

"It is far better if the forces are replaced by UN forces. Following that, the Iraqi people should be allowed to exercise their rights to choose their own government.

"Whoever they choose to become their government must be accepted by the rest of the world even if the rest of the world do not like the new government that they had chosen," he said in response to a question during a media conference Tuesday at the end of his three-day official visit to Algeria.

At a state banquet hosted by Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika Monday night, Dr Mahathir said in his speech that Iraq was very likely to descend into anarchy unless the UN takes full control of the country.

After his visit here, Dr Mahathir will attend the South African International Dialogue (SAID) in Swaziland before leaving for Damascus on Saturday where talks with Syrian President Dr Bashar Al-Assad is also expected to touch on the same issue.

The Prime Minister also said that the invasion and occupation of Iraq had been identified as one the two main causes of terrorism, besides the Palestinian issue.

He reiterated that until the causes of terrorism were removed, there would always be terrorism.

Asked what could be expected from the 10th OIC Summit in Malaysia in October, Dr Mahathir said the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) should work together to apply pressure on the UN and other powerful nations to put an end to the causes of terrorism.

He said that the OIC should be able to give a clear picture to the world on Islam and make the world understand that Islam is not about terrorism.

Dr Mahathir also welcomed the proposed setting up of an African Study and Research Centre on Terrorism in Algeria, saying that it should exchange information and approaches in dealing with terrorism with the Regional Centre for Counter Terrorism which had been established in Kuala Lumpur.

On his visit here, Dr Mahathir said he had a very long discussion with President Bouteflika which enabled both leaders to better understand each other's country and identified areas of cooperation between the two nations.

However, the Prime Minister said that there should be follow-up meetings at ministerial as well as senior officials level.

Replying to a question by an Algerian journalist, Dr Mahathir said that the imbalance of trade which was currently in favour of Malaysia could be improved as there were many items and products which had been identified to be marketable in Malaysia.

"I notice that you have very good marbles and other kinds of stones which I think would be very easily marketed in Malaysia. Besides that, I'm quite sure there are food products and various other products which we

would like to import into Malaysia," he said.

The Prime Minister also explained that the proposed establishment of a Malaysian bank in Algeria was to facilitate trade between Malaysian companies and their Algerian counterparts.

He said that Malaysian companies should also share their experience in many areas particularly construction and privatisation projects.

Before the media conference, Dr Mahathir witnessed the signing of an agreement on news exchange between the Malaysian news agency, Bernama, and its Algerian counterpart, the Algerie Presse Service (APS).

Bernama was represented by its general manager, Datuk Syed Jamil Jaafar, while APS by its director-general, Nacer Mehal.

Earlier at the Malaysia-Algeria Business Dialogue, Dr Mahathir was warmly applauded by the Algerian business community as he fielded questions from the floor on Islam and modernisation.

In expressing his gratitude and appreciation to Dr Mahathir, a participant described him as a respected Muslim leader who has always stood out in defending Islam.

"May God Bless You," he said.

To that, Dr Mahathir stressed the need for Muslims to acquire as much knowledge especially in science and mathematics before they could defend the religion and its ummah.

"Today, we are no longer able to defend ourselves with bows and arrows (like during the days of the Prophet)," he said.

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