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Mahathir-Committee

DR MAHATHIR EXPECTS A FAIR TRIAL FOR SADDAM

PUTRAJAYA, June 17 (Bernama) -- Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said he agreed to join a designated group to help in the defence of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's rights to a fair and lawful trial.

The former Prime Minister said: "In the case of Saddam Hussein, my concern is mainly to see whether what they have done will fall into law, whether the trial is going to be legal or not."

"(But) as far as he is guilty or otherwise, that is, it is not my concern," he told a press conference here on his inclusion in the group called the Emergency Committee for Iraq, which also consisted of three other highly-regarded international politicians, here today.

He said he is interested to join the group because of its main role to see whether that the Iraqi Special Tribunal that would put him on trial is a properly constituted court.

"This is because a properly constituted court has every right. (Whether) probably it (the Iraqi Special Tribunal) has instituted a legal court which has every right to determine whether Saddam is guilty or not guilty," he said.

"In the first place, there must be a properly constituted court that he is legally trialed," said Dr Mahathir.

He said he agreed to cooperate after a discussion with US Attorney-General Ramsey Clarke whom he met in Amman, Jordan, recently.

"We had a long discussion about this and I maintain that our interest is here (to seek a fair trial for Saddam)," he said.

He is also of the view that the legal fraternity in Malaysia is also interested to see that the trial of Saddam would be conducted in a fair and equitable manner.

On the sort of actions that the Emergency Committee for Iraq can take to ensure a legal trial for Saddam he said, "Well, in the first place, I think the legal people believe that Saddam must have access to his lawyers."

"Up to this point in time, there is no evidence that he has been given access to his lawyers and yet there already have seen instances where he has already been questioned to the benefit of a particular group, which is illegal," he said.

A foreign news wire report on Tuesday quoted the committee's spokeswoman as saying it is of utmost importance to historic truth, public justice and peace that the United States respects the dignity and rights of Saddam and all officials of the former government of Iraq with absolute fidelity.

She said "The (US President George W.) Bush administration has deliberately deprived (Saddam) and other officials of the right to counsel of choice, family visits, and any access of information."

Besides Dr Mahathir and Clarke, the committee also consists of former French Foreign Minister Ronald Dumas, and Algerian President Ahmed Ben Bella.

-- BERNAMA

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