

26/01/2004

Failure to find WMD in Iraq: Malaysia right in opposing war, says Dr M

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Malaysia today gave a collective "I told you so" to the United States following the revelation by chief US weapons hunter David Kay that Iraq did not have a large-scale programme to produce chemical and biological weapons.

Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, one of the most vocal opponents to the invasion of Iraq, said the failure of US weapons inspectors to find the weapons proved Malaysia was right in opposing the war.

"We have always said so, from the start, that there are no weapons of mass destruction," he said at the Langkawi International Airport before leaving for Kuala Lumpur.

"You cannot hide weapons of mass destruction."

The existence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction was the key rationale behind the US decision to invade Iraq in March but in his annual State of the Union address on Tuesday, US President George W. Bush maintained that former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had actively pursued dangerous weapons programmes right up to the start of the invasion.

Asked if this proved that Malaysia was right in opposing the war, Dr Mahathir said: "Think and you will see..."

At the height of the war last March, he said claims that Iraq was dangerous and a threat to the world with its weapons of mass destruction was "totally illogical" and could not be accepted as the reason for the US-led invasion.

Institute of Strategic and International Studies chief executive officer and chairman Tan Sri Dr Noordin Sopiee said the issue now was why Saddam did not deny the existence of the WMD more vehemently.

"I see two reasons: first, he wanted to scare foreign powers into thinking that he did have weapons to prevent attacks on Iraq and second, to make the Iraqis fear him further," he said.

"He had used chemical warfare before and wanted to impose further power. This is the mother of all bluffs."

However, he does not think that Kay's revelation would affect Bush's influence over Americans.

"Americans have short memories. Right from the start, they thought there was a connection between Al-Qaeda and Saddam, when this was never proven," he said. "I doubt there will be much change."

He said there was a high probability Bush would get away with it and be re-elected in the US presidential elections in November.

Malaysian Strategic Research Centre executive director Abdul Razak Baginda said the revelation confirmed there was no basis for the attack "Now there is proof that the US had no justification for their attack," he said.

"It would be different if the US went to war and later admitted that they only wanted to get rid of Saddam and remove his threat from the Middle East.

"It is good America has come out with the admission as this will end the guessing game on whether there were destructive weapons in Iraq."

International Movement for a Just World (JUST) president Dr Chandra Muzaffar said it was important that someone who worked closely with the CIA made the revelation.

"The argument for WMD was just a smokescreen to justify the invasion."

The main objective was to secure a new source of oil."

He also did not think that there would be significant changes in the American leadership.

"The discovery of lies and untruths does not, unfortunately, figure very highly with the American public," he said.

"For Americans, deaths of their soldiers, not Iraqis, are more pressing."