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PM hopes US won't cause collapse of UN

By Hardev Kaur

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad hopes history will not repeat itself with the collapse of the 58-year-old United Nations following the US decision to go to war without UN sanction.

"We have seen that if the US ignores the view of the UN, then history will repeat itself," he said.

"This will be disastrous for the world because it means there will be no more consultations in the management of the world," Dr Mahathir added.

He cited the example of the League of Nations, first proposed by the 28th President of the US, Woodrow Wilson, which collapsed as the US withdrew from it. The proposal by Wilson was intended to serve as the basis for world peace. The League of Nations was succeeded by the United Nations in 1946.

Dr Mahathir was asked, during a Press conference, about the US intention to go to war with or without UN sanction.

Earlier the Prime Minister, who is on a two-day visit to Brazil, which began on Monday, was given a ceremonial welcome. This was followed by bilateral discussions with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

Both leaders agreed on the need for multilateralism and resolving the Iraq crisis peacefully under the aegis of the UN and that no action should be taken unilaterally.

The Prime Minister hoped US President George W. Bush thinks very seriously of the impact of the announced intention to go ahead with attack even if the UN is not going to sanction it.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan too has warned that the legitimacy of the UN will be questioned and "support for it diminished" if the US goes ahead with military action, without the support of the UN Security Council.

Ignoring world opinion, Bush has given Saddam Hussein 48 hours to leave with his sons or face war.

This action without UN sanction by an American President and British Prime Minister Tony Blair is ironic as the notion of collective security under the UN was in fact the brainchild of an American President, Franklin Roosevelt, and a British Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill.

Five-and-a-half decades later their successors (Bush and Blair) may have sown the seeds of the UN's demise, effectiveness and undermining the need for "collective security".

Asked what developing countries like Malaysia and Brazil could do at this late stage when the apparatus and mechanisms of war are in place, Dr Mahathir said: "The only thing we can do is be of the same mind and express our views, especially to the American people. One of the ways of influencing the US is to influence the people.

"Appealing to the (US) Government is not worthwhile," he said adding that an increasing number of the American public feel that the US should not go to war.

The NGOs and other organisations through their connections could ask them (the people) not to support the war, then maybe they can help force the US government to change its mind.

The Prime Minister pointed out that it was public opinion that forced the end of the Vietnam war.

He said during the bilateral meeting with President da Silva discussions on joint action were also raised. Da Silva told Dr Mahathir that he has

written to the UN Secretary-General suggesting that there be a meeting of the heads of government of countries that are not members of the Security Council.

Da Silva gave Dr Mahathir a copy of the proposal, which he (the Prime Minister) said he has not read.

In reply to another question, Dr Mahathir said he did not think Islamic countries could do anything about the war, adding that they are very weak.

"But their people are angry. All they care about is revenge. The war will destabilise the world. War with Iraq will not benefit anybody.

"Even if the West wins the war, it would not last. It will not cause Muslim countries to fight against the West but there are 1.3 billion Muslims around the world and no one can stop somebody bent on committing suicide by bombing.

"How do you stop somebody, walking in Europe, America or Malaysia, some angry Muslim from taking a shot?"

Meanwhile, at the bilateral meeting which extended beyond the original schedule, the two leaders also discussed ways of strengthening and enhancing bilateral and regional cooperation.

Among the areas explored were the possibility of closer co-operation between Mercusor (South Common Market of Countries in South America) and Asean, strengthening relations.

Brazil is also keen to learn from Malaysia's experience of handling the crisis in an "unorthodox" manner and with home-grown policies. Brazil had received a US\$30 billion (RM114 billion) lifeline from the IMF.

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