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Dr Mahathir: It's a big lie (HL)

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PUTRAJAYA, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Central Intelligence Agency's failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq proved that the United States and Britain had concocted a big lie in order to attack Iraq.

Dr Mahathir said claims that Iraq could attack Britain with WMD within 45 minutes had not only been proven wrong but were also baseless according to the CIA report.

"That (the claims) was a big lie. I don't believe that they didn't know that Iraq had no WMD," said Dr Mahathir at a Press conference on preparations for the OIC Summit.

CIA adviser David Kay's report to US lawmakers on Thursday said there were no biological or chemical weapons in Iraq.

"Even if they had suspected something to that effect they should have allowed UN chief weapons inspector Hans Blix to carry out a full investigation," Dr Mahathir said.

"First they said Iraq could attack them in 45 minutes, then they confirmed that Iraq had WMD.

"Later, they said that Saddam (Hussein) had plans to produce WMD, so they attacked Iraq and destroyed the country, killing thousands of innocent people.

"But now there is no trace of anything at all.

"We are saddened by the fact that leaders who are supposed to be the guardians of world peace are willing to destroy a country and kill its people based on very flimsy evidence which has now been proven to be untrue."

Asked if the people of Iraq or the world community should initiate action against President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair, he said any decision could not possibly be enforced.

On whether it was time for the US and Britain to end their occupation of Iraq since all their allegations had been proven wrong, Dr Mahathir said: "Even when they are wrong they are not going to say that they are wrong.

"In Japan, normally when they are wrong they commit harakiri but the Westerners have got a different attitude."

Bush, already knocked off stride by a leak investigation, awoke to headlines that the US team led by Kay had reported it found no biological or chemical weapons in Iraq and that a CBS-New York Times poll showed a drop in American confidence in the president's skill in handling crises.

But Bush defended the invasion. "I can't think of any people who think that the world would be a safe place with Saddam Hussein in power," he said.

Specifically, the poll found growing doubts about whether the Iraq war was worth the cost. Only 41 per cent said it was, while 53 per cent said it was not, although about half said it was worth removing Saddam from power. Bush said he did not make decisions based on polls.

Democrats reacted strongly to Kay's report.

Coming six months after the US and its staunch ally Britain unilaterally declared war against Iraq and invaded the oil-rich nation, the CIA report also said that the US team conducting the WMD hunt failed to find any evidence to confirm pre-war allegations that the Iraqi military was prepared for chemical warfare against US-led forces.

"All I can say is I didn't believe there was an imminent threat to the

US when we went to war," said Massachusetts Democratic Senator Edward Kennedy.

"And I'm more convinced from listening to him (Kay) that there never was a threat."

California Democratic Rep Nancy Pelosi, the minority leader in the House of Representatives, said after meeting with Kay: "I have concluded that there was no imminent threat."

Michigan Democratic Sen Carl Levin said the fact that no weapons had been found came "despite the intelligence that was given to us prior to the war by the administration".