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Full interview with Dr Mahathir

Q: The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has been concerned with achieving independence but it now faces an era of colonisation. Do you agree with this and what can be done? Also, is there anything more that can be done apart from demonstrations against war and collecting donations for victims for each tragedy affecting Muslims?

A: Initially, NAM was concerned with decolonisation and that has been achieved. Now it is for NAM to maintain the independence of these countries.

Unfortunately, today's colonisation takes many forms, among which is economic hegemony. It is not so easy for countries to work together to face this kind of colonisation. The majority of NAM members would do everything they could to preserve their independence.

However, they face a new phenomenon in which there is no respect for morality, no respect for international law and in the face of this, NAM will find difficulties in trying to maintain the independence of member countries.

As far as many countries are concerned, all they can do is to demonstrate, to invoke feelings of morality and to try and get the assistance of other countries, including the developed ones, because they are also not united in this war.

We have to work with those who still believe in international law and usefulness of the United Nations. That's what we can do, through demonstrations and contacts with people who are sympathetic, including non-governmental organisations. There are other things that we can do, but because we are not united, it is not possible.

Q: Do you think the divisions among developing and Muslim countries have resulted in war becoming inevitable, and an inability for NAM and the Organisation of Islamic Conference to play a more effective role?

A: Yes, that is true. But on the other hand, we also find the other side, the North, divided. So some of those against the war can work with those against the war in the North and try to find a solution to this.

Q: Should we look for a new coalition in reviving the United Nations, co-operating with countries such as China and Germany?

A: The UN at the moment is totally ineffective, if not useless, because it has failed to uphold the law and it has no means to uphold the law. Our hopes lie in co-operating with countries in the North that are against the war and want to restore good international behaviour, respect for international law and the UN.

To achieve this, they must be strong in opposing the Americans and British. But at the same time, the only way for America to stop (war) is with their own people throwing out their government.

Q: Assuming the US achieves its objectives in Iraq, can weak and small countries feel safe in the future?

A: Firstly, a government imposed on Iraq by another country is not going to work. It will not get the co-operation of the Iraqi people, I believe. They will always look upon such a government as a foreign government, as a puppet government.

If the Americans succeed in defeating Iraq and imposing a government of their choice there, then other countries will feel very insecure. Already Syria is being targeted, ostensibly for helping the Iraqis, and now Pakistan is said to be co-operating in nuclear technology and is believed

to be in possession of weapons of mass destruction.

We do not know whether Pakistan and Syria will be the next target for the same reason that these countries are a threat to the US. So any country, including Iran, will not feel safe anymore.

Q: We have heard much about the objectives of this war, that is, liberating the Iraqis; what is your thought on this?

A: I believe the objective is to ensure that Iraq becomes totally incapable of defending itself at any time after. And of course there will be the oil they can get from Iraq. But mainly, I think it is to fulfil Israel's objectives, which is to eliminate any threat to Israel in the Middle East.

Q: The US agenda on fighting terrorism in Southeast Asia. How do you think countries in this region will respond to this after the war in Iraq?

A: To the extent that it is in their interest to do so, these countries will still carry on the fight against terrorism. But they will not be involved in the fight against terrorism, which is to complement the policy in the Middle East, that is the conquest of Iraq and threats to other countries in the region.

Q: Do you think the media is biased in the coverage of the war? What is your comment about the US' unhappiness with some Arab television stations?

A: Definitely the US media is not reporting the truth. There have been all kinds of reports that have been proven wrong. For example, some reports say they have captured this and that town but it turned out that they have not.

The British said their soldiers were executed and now the relatives of a soldier denied he was executed.

They have been telling a lot of lies throughout the war. Viewers are being denied the truth about the war. As you can see, Peter Arnett (former CNBC correspondent) has been removed simply because he said something that they didn't like.

I believe the Al-Jazeera office in the US has been closed down, which means that the talk about freedom of the Press is sheer nonsense; it is hypocrisy. When it suits them, there is no freedom of the Press.

Q: As a trading nation, Malaysia has important economic ties with the US, apart from defence and security co-operation. On the other hand, your position has been consistent on terrorism and Iraq. How do you balance between the two?

A: We will have to try and ensure that our market remains our market, that is the US. But we cannot do that at the expense of the truth of the situation. Because eventually if this thing actually goes through and Iraq is occupied, we too will not feel safe.

That is why we must speak the truth now and not later. Of course, if we are the subject of an attack, all the good relations and trade will come to nothing.

Q: While analysts are talking about the so-called "business of the war" for some companies, a majority of the people around the world are concerned about the impact of the war on the global economy, which might be disastrous. How do you look at this?

A: The war is already causing economic disaster for the whole world. Everybody is suffering now, there is very little economic growth even in countries very far from the scene of the war and I think the US is suffering economically.

Whether they win or lose the war, the problem is not how to revive the Iraqi economy but the world's economy. Then it is going to take a very long time because there will be no confidence, people will always live in fear of new terrorist attacks, there will be new terrorists who are just as angry that they want to crash into the World Trade Center.

People will not fly; we know most US airlines have been bankrupted, most European airlines are in trouble and when the airlines fail, other (related) industries like hotel, travel agencies and tourism will fail.

These are very big contributors to the economy of Europe, the US and the world. The economy of the world is going to be so bad that talking about rebuilding Iraq would be hypocrisy because nobody can rebuild Iraq, just like they cannot rebuild Afghanistan.

Q: Will there be a different economic scenario if the war is prolonged, the impact on Asia and Malaysia, which is a trading nation and oil producing country?

A: Whether it is a short or long war, the effect is going to be the same. It is going to cause world recession or at least failure of growth throughout the world.

Malaysia will, of course, be affected by it, but we have to make contingency plans, we have to find other ways of enriching our country. We have to work out certain strategies. It will not be as good as if there had been no war. We have to accept that the war will have a very negative effect on us but we think that we can still maintain some growth.