

21/08/2003

Hand over Iraq to UN, Dr M tells US

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PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today urged the United States to relinquish its governance of post-war Iraq and hand over responsibility to the United Nations after yesterday's bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad.

Condemning the bomb attack which has so far claimed 20 lives, including that of top UN envoy Sergio Vieira de Mello, the Prime Minister said the world body should take full control of Iraq until the Iraqis were able to manage their country themselves.

"I don't understand why such attacks are aimed at the UN. The world body has done nothing wrong, but the perpetrators kill as they please and have no consideration for their action.

"The UN is there and should be there but it should take over the management of Iraq from the Americans until Iraq is able to manage itself."

Dr Mahathir was asked if the UN should consider withdrawing its presence from the war-torn nation until the multilateral organisation assumed control from the present US-installed Governing Council.

The Prime Minister was speaking at the Putrajaya Lake Club after presenting certificates of participation to members of the Simex Mission to India.

World outrage over the devastating bombing was accompanied by growing fears of the deteriorating security situation in Iraq even as UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan vowed that the UN will not abandon the country.

Annan, flying back to New York to attend a UN Security Council meeting, said in Stockholm that the UN would not be deterred by a "senseless act of terrorism" from continuing its work in Iraq.

Many commentators said the bombing highlighted the need for a greater rather than a reduced UN presence in Iraq.

Asked if the attack on UN shows that the world body has lost respect and immunity, particularly at hot spots, Dr Mahathir said: "Well, you are not dealing with people who obey any particular rules, they (attackers) do just what they like."

No group has claimed responsibility for the bombing so far, but the Governing Council has started pointing its fingers at the al-Qaeda terror network and the followers of Saddam Hussein.

On Sunday, while on a two-day working visit to Syria, Dr Mahathir had emphasised that Kuala Lumpur would not send peacekeepers to Iraq or take part in any official activity there without the sanction of the UN.

Responding to a query pertaining the US' request for peacekeeping forces from Muslim and Arab countries, Dr Mahathir firmly ruled it out, saying that Malaysia would only take part if sanctioned by the UN.