

26/10/2003

PM: Bush the biggest liar (HL)

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PETALING JAYA, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said President George W. Bush's assertion that he rebuked him at the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation Summit in Bangkok is the "biggest lie of all".

The Prime Minister said if Bush had in fact rebuked him, he would have reacted in his normal manner and returned the rebuke.

"I'm told now that Bush said he rebuked me," he said at a Press conference on his return from visits to Indonesia, Timor Leste and Papua New Guinea.

"That is the biggest lie of all, because all he said was 'I regret that I had strong words, said strong words against you'.

"This is what I remember. If he had rebuked me, I'm quite sure I'd have reacted in my normal way - I would have rebuked him also."

Bush had made a statement during his visit to Indonesia on Wednesday (after attending the Apec Summit) that he rebuked Dr Mahathir for his remarks about Jews when they met at the Apec meeting.

"But then, it is not strange because I'm told that his officers told the Press that he rebuked me and now, of course, he must support his officers. This is very common.

"If you can tell a lie about the existence of weapons of mass destruction and go to war because of it, I'm not surprised if he is prepared to lie about what he said to me.

"In any case, that is something of minor importance. What is important is that I was able to give my views at the Apec meeting on the need to restructure the international financial regime as well as my views on the World Trade Organisation meeting in Cancun (Mexico)."

Last Tuesday, while still in Bangkok, Dr Mahathir had dismissed as untrue reports quoting US officials that he was rebuked by Bush. The very next day, Bush had told the media in Indonesia that he had indeed rebuked Dr Mahathir.

"I don't know how people can come to that conclusion because I know for a fact that nobody heard what was said," Dr Mahathir said in Bangkok.

"He did pull me aside to explain why he made such a strong statement against me. I told him I understood. That was all."

In his speech at the opening of the OIC Summit, Dr Mahathir was critical of Muslims and Jews for the state of the world today, but his speech was twisted and portrayed as being anti-Semitic, drawing some harsh response from Jewish groups and governments which depended on their support.

The government jet carrying Dr Mahathir and wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali arrived home from Papua New Guinea at the Royal Malaysian Air Force Base in Subang at 6.50pm.

Welcoming them were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, his wife Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Shafie Salleh and Deputy Defence Minister Datuk Shafiee Apdal.

Dr Mahathir was also asked at the Press conference if he was worried about the negative impact of his remarks about Jews since the foreign media had been harping on the issue daily and running down Malaysia.

"That is something that I think is managed by the Jews because the (international media) Press belongs to the Jews and their power is so great that people are afraid to criticise them, as if they are beyond criticism.

"On the other hand, you can accuse Muslims of being terrorists, accuse

Prophet Muhammad of being a terrorist and Europe does not protest.

"But because I said what is true - that the Jews control the world through proxy - I don't see why people should get annoyed with this. It is absolutely true."

Dr Mahathir added that the recent boycott call against investing in Malaysia by a Jewish group was the kind of pressure they applied against anyone who failed to toe their line.

Asked if the nation's economy and growth could be affected by such actions by the "powerful", Dr Mahathir said that while it might have some minor effect, the business community who invested in or were considering to invest here would know Malaysia and what it held for them.

"We may be affected but the question is `do we allow ourselves to be blackmailed or do we stand up for what is right?' I don't think we should allow ourselves to be black-mailed by them.

"If you don't say nice things I will not invest in your country, I will put out my investment... that is black-mail."

Malaysia, he said, would not bow to unwarranted pressure from any group or nation.

The Prime Minister was also asked about the Australian SBS TV's Dateline report which linked former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to the funding of terrorist activities.

The channel had reported that the Washington-based International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), of which Anwar was one of three directors, was accused in the United States of funding terrorist activities, including the support of the Islamic Jihad.

"We don't really know, I mean we sometimes have relations with organisations and we think that they are doing something right and because of that we support, but they may be doing other things which we may not know.

"I don't know whether Datuk Seri Anwar knows or doesn't know about these other activities, but it is up to the Americans to prove that the IIIT is involved in terrorism. I know nothing about this."

On Bush's remarks at the Australian Parliament during which he said that Australia had an important role in ensuring peace in the region, Dr Mahathir reiterated Kuala Lumpur's stance of not tolerating unsolicited interference by anyone.

Asked if Asean should issue a statement to state the grouping's position over such claims by the US, he said that he was not sure of Asean but stressed that Australia has no "peace-keeper" role here.

"Although they are members of the Five Power Defence pact here we don't expect them to help us. We have asked them to leave the country, their airforce and all that, but we are still kind enough to allow them to practise here," he said.

At the Press conference which was also attended by Abdullah, Dr Mahathir also spoke of his experience with a New Zealand journalist who harassed him about democracy in Malaysia during his visit to Papua New Guinea.

He said the journalist was very critical of Malaysia's judiciary, rule of law and the way democracy was practised here and wanted Anwar released from prison.

"If he takes his own argument then New Zealand should hand over the country to the Maoris.

"Basically he wanted me to release Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim. I had to explain to him that I really don't have any authority to release prisoners; maybe in his country his Prime Minister could release prisoners on his birthday or her birthday but in Malaysia the Prime Minister has got no such authority."