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Iraq war an economic disaster for the world, says Dr M

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The world economy is going to be so badly affected by the war in Iraq that talk about rebuilding that country after the conflict is sheer hypocrisy, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said the effects of the war would be the same, regardless of whether it was a prolonged one or not.

"It is going to cause world recession or at least failure of growth throughout the world," said the Prime Minister, who is on two months' leave, in an interview with Al-Jazeera at Sri Perdana on Wednesday.

The interview by the Qatar-based station was conducted by its regional correspondent in Malaysia, Sohaib Jassim. It was broadcast in Qatar tonight.

"The war is already causing economic disaster. Everybody is suffering now; there is very little growth even in countries far away from the scene of the battle."

He said even the United States was suffering economically. "Whether they win or lose, the problem is not how to revive the Iraqi economy but the world's."

"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, people will not fly and airlines will suffer like in the US where many have been made bankrupt."

He said when airlines collapsed, other supporting and related industries like hotels, travel agencies and tourism would also be affected.

He was also asked about the United Nations, the role that could be played by members of the Non-Aligned Movement and Organisation of Islamic Conference to stop the war in Iraq, the future of small and weak countries in the face of US hegemony, media coverage of the war and the fight against terrorism in Southeast Asia.

He said the new government to be installed by the US in Iraq was bound to fail.

"This was because it would not be able to get the co-operation of Iraqis who would always view the government as a puppet of the US."

"The US and Britain are at odds over a post-war Iraq. The US intends to play a leading role while Tony Blair declared that the country should be run by Iraqis, not Britons nor Americans."

He said the move by the US to appoint a government of its choice in Iraq had worried many countries which feared that they might be next on the list.

"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."

He said Iraq was invaded purportedly because it posed a threat to the US.

For the same reason, he said, countries such as Syria, Pakistan and Iran would not know whether they would be the next target.

He said the only way to stop the war was for Americans to replace their government.