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`UN must insist US, allies end war'

Firdaus Abdullah

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The United Nations must be unequivocal and focused in demanding the US and its allies stop their aggression on Iraq and withdraw their troops immediately, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said rather than being futuristic by discussing the rebuilding of Iraq after the on-going destruction, the UN should be realistic and practical in addressing the demise of international law and the suffering of innocent Iraqis.

"What the UN should be doing now is insist that the US stop its campaign and withdraw from Iraq," he said.

Speaking at a Press conference at Parliament building after tabling a motion condemning the invasion of Iraq, Dr Mahathir said he agreed with calls for UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to resign as he had failed to stop the aggression on Iraq.

"That is the problem with the Secretary-General. He is not a free agent, he is very much subject to pressure and therefore whatever he says is not reflective of the opinion of the UN.

"Well I think Kofi Annan should resign, but then it creates a problem also because you won't have a Secretary-General and to appoint a (new) Secretary-General you have to get the consent of very powerful people," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the US action was a bad precedent which was dangerous and would affect every nation.

He said the US' total disregard for international law and conventions also endorsed the notion that might was right.

"It (the invasion) shows that the concept of an international body that regulates national behaviour has now been rejected, so other countries are entitled to disregard international law and the UN.

"It is unfortunate that these bodies were created by the US itself, the League of Nations and now the UN, and then subsequently when it doesn't suit them they just ignore (so now) we will be exposed to attacks by anyone who is strong," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia, as a concerned independent nation and as the chair of the 116-nation Non-Aligned Movement, would take all necessary measures to build anti-war public opinion.

"NAM will try to build up public opinion in all countries including in the US and Britain. We believe that many people in Britain and the US are against this unilateral war against Iraq," Dr Mahathir said, adding that NGOs and trade unions throughout the world should also play their part to save innocent lives.

On the US' opposition to a NAM- initiated move to table a motion for an emergency session of the UN to condemn the invasion, Dr Mahathir said US has no right to dictate or decide the responsibility of the UN since the superpower had no respect for the world body.

On the US Government's request for the closure of Iraq's diplomatic missions around the world and for the expulsion of their nationals from countries around the world, he said Malaysia had not received such a request but "the US has no right to do so".

To another question, Dr Mahathir said Kuala Lumpur does not see the reason to review its diplomatic ties with the US and Britain or to boycott their products.

"In the first place we don't even believe that the action taken by the

US Government reflects the thinking of most Americans. I don't think the time has come for us to consider that (boycott)" and expressed his dismay over some Asean members' support for the war.

"I think it is very unfortunate, if you support war as a solution to problems between countries then you should expect war against your own country," he said.

Responding to a question from a British journalist on how badly a Muslim government must behave before the rest of the Muslim world responded to rectify the situation, Dr Mahathir said: "We believe in not-interference in the internal affairs of other countries" and added that what Muslim nations were doing should not arise because the UN and the US never lifted a finger when the Serbs slaughtered the Bosnians.

He said that 200,000 Bosnians were effectively massacred by the Serbs before action was finally taken.

Asked about the lame attitude of Arab nations in the wake of the aggression on Iraq, Dr Mahathir said these nations are under pressure and are being forced to do whatever they were doing.

On claims that it was a "clean war" with "precise bombing", he said: "Well it is a very clean and precise war with precise, accurate weapons ...so much so that the Americans have already shot down a British plane, that is how accurate it is."

Dr Mahathir when asked about the US' objection to Iraqi television footage of American soldiers who have been either killed, captured or surrendered in the invasion, he said it was too late for the US to invoke international law having no respect for the UN and its laws.

"In the first place, they paraded the Iraqi personnel who surrendered, so who showed what first?

"They paraded ... we can see the pictures in the New Straits Times and all the other papers, Iraqi soldiers who had surrendered with their hands on their head. So what is wrong with the Iraqis parading the American personnel who surrendered to them or who were captured by them?" he said.

Dr Mahathir said that although Malaysia was against the invasion of Iraq and was trying to drum up support for the cause, anti-war demonstrations here would be controlled to prevent any untoward incidents.