

# Envoys walk out on Mahathir

BY M. KRISHNAMOORTHY

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Three European diplomats walked out of the conference hall during Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's speech when he criticised US and British policies on Iraq.

His comments that the American and British-led invasion of Iraq was based on lies that the country possessed weapons of mass destruction did not go down well with British High Commissioner Bruce Cleghorn, Hungarian ambassador Tamas Toth and Dutch deputy ambassador Luc

Schillings, who got up and left.

The former prime minister was speaking at a conference on human rights organised by the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) which was attended by about 350 participants.

"The British and American bomber pilots came, unopposed, safe and cosy in their state-of-the-art aircraft, pressing buttons to drop bombs, to kill and maim real people who were their targets, just targets.

"And these murderers, for that is what they are, would go back to celebrate mission

accomplished," Dr Mahathir said.

At a press conference later, when asked what he thought of the diplomats walking out, he said: "Well! I am sorry. As much as they have the right to criticise me, they should give me the right to criticise them.

"But if you don't want to hear my criticisms of them, then you are denying my right to speak up."

Dr Mahathir added that there was no tally of Iraqi deaths but every single death of an American was reported to the world.

"These are soldiers who must

expect to be killed. But the Iraqis who died because of US action or the civil war in Iraq that the US precipitated were innocent civilians who under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein would have been alive.

"You and I read reports of the death of Iraqis with equanimity as if it is right and just. You and I do not react with anger and horror over this injustice, this abuse of the rights of the Iraqis to live, to be free from terror including state-initiated terror," he said.

When Cleghorn was asked to comment on his walkout, he

issued a statement: "I was invited by Suhakam to attend the opening of their Human Rights Day conference.

"I accepted out of respect for Suhakam and for Tun Dr Mahathir.

"Unfortunately I found myself listening to abuse and misrepresentation about my country. I therefore left."

Suhakam commissioner Prof Datuk Hamdan Adnan said the walkout was "very, very distasteful."

"If they claim to subscribe to the democratic process, why can't they listen?" he asked.



Cleghorn: 'I found myself listening to abuse'