

Malaysia ex-PM sparks UK walkout

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Ex-Malaysian Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad has accused the UK of "state-initiated terror" in a speech.



His remarks on the Iraq war prompted the British high commissioner and several other diplomats to walk out. Dr Mahathir said US and UK pilots in Iraq were "murderers" and compared the war to rocket attacks on Palestinians. Dr Mahathir, often criticised for his poor human rights record in office, was making the speech at a conference on the subject in Kuala Lumpur.

Dr Mahathir is perhaps best known internationally for his part in the downfall of deputy and protege Ibrahim Anwar. Mr Anwar was jailed in 1999 on charges of corruption and sodomy that he said were politically motivated. He was freed in September 2004 by a Malaysian appeal court.

Dr Mahathir used his speech to turn the tables on critics of his record during 22 years in power. He said the UK and the US invaded Iraq on a lie and compared what they had done to Israeli attacks on Palestinians. The former prime minister accused British and American pilots of returning to base to celebrate after bombing civilians.

“ Who are the terrorists - the people below who were bombed or the bombers? ”

Dr Mahathir Mohamad

"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. And these murderers, for that is what they are, would go back to celebrate 'mission accomplished'. Who are the terrorists? The people below who were bombed or the bombers? Whose rights have been snatched away?"

Dr Mahathir also turned on Western human rights campaigners, who he said had ignored the plight of the Iraqi people during a decade of sanctions that followed the first Gulf war. Half a dozen European diplomats joined the British High Commissioner, Bruce Cleghorn, in walking out. Mr Cleghorn said: "I found myself listening to abuse and misrepresentation about my country. I therefore left." A Foreign Office spokesman told BBC News: "We don't believe his [Dr Mahathir's] views represent those of the Malaysian government and we therefore do not think that they will affect our good relations with the Malaysian government.