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"PA" NEWS
Fri 9 Sep 2005

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11:40am (UK)

Walkout over 'terrorist UK' speech

Malaysia's former leader Mahathir Mohamad has called the US and Britain "state terrorists" for invading Iraq, blaming them for thousands of Iraqi civilian deaths in the ensuing violence.

Several British and European diplomats - including Britain's High Commissioner, Bruce Cleghorn - walked out in protest of Mahathir's speech at a national human rights conference in the capital Kuala Lumpur.

The US Embassy had not sent representatives to the event.

"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," Mahathir said.

"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?"

Later, Cleghorn said he had attended the conference out of respect for Mahathir as a former prime minister.

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

Mahathir, prime minister of Muslim-majority Malaysia for 22 years before retiring in 2003, regularly launched visceral attacks on the West and Israel while in power.

At a news conference later, he said: "If you terrify people then you are a terrorist, and the people of Iraq are terrified of being bombed. They (the US and Britain) are state terrorists."

Mahathir co-chairs the international Emergency Committee for Iraq, formed in June to ensure Saddam Hussein's trial is fair. He said trial judges should be from countries not directly involved in the invasion.

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