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MAHATHIR-SADDAM R'R'R'

BM

KUALA LUMPUR, AUG 11 (BERNAMA) -- PRIME MINISTER DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TODAY HE WAS PREPARED TO CONTACT IRAQI PRESIDENT SADDAM HUSSEIN IN AN EFFORT TO BRING HOME MALAYSIANS STRANDED IN KUWAIT AND IRAQ.

+THERE HAS BEEN A SUGGESTION THAT I SPEAK WITH PRESIDENT SADDAM HUSSEIN ... IF HE CAN BE CONTACTED AND WOULD WANT TO SPEAK WITH ME, I AM WILLING,+ HE SAID AFTER CHAIRING A MEETING OF THE UMNO SUPREME COUNCIL HERE.

THE GOVERNMENT WOULD DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO BRING HOME THE STRANDED MALAYSIANS, HE SAID.

HE ALSO SAID THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY WOULD TAKE UP THE SUGGESTION OF RELATIVES OF THE STRANDED MALAYSIANS THAT THE GOVERNMENT USE THE GOOD OFFICES OF THIRD PARTIES SUCH AS KING HUSSEIN OF JORDAN AND PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANISATION (PLO) LEADER YASSER ARAFAT TO ENABLE THE MALAYSIANS TO LEAVE KUWAIT AND IRAQ.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT THOUGH THE GOVERNMENT HAD MADE ARRANGEMENTS TO BRING BACK THE MALAYSIANS THROUGH SAUDI ARABIA OR JORDAN, THE TASK HAD BEEN MADE DIFFICULT OWING TO A DISRUPTION OF TELECOMMUNICATION LINKS. -- MORE
1431MST 11 08 90

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MAHATHIR-SADDAM 2 KUALA LUMPUR

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THE IRAQI AMBASSADOR TO MALAYSIA, HISHAM FAKHRI AL-TABAQCHALI, WHO WAS SUMMONED BY THE GOVERNMENT, WAS UNABLE TO GIVE ANY INFORMATION ON THE STRANDED MALAYSIANS.

HOWEVER, INFORMATION GATHERED FROM OTHER FOREIGN DIPLOMATS, ESPECIALLY THE SWEDISH, INDICATED THAT ALL MALAYSIANS IN THE TWO GULF COUNTRIES WERE SAFE, HE SAID.

HE ALSO SAID THAT THE MALAYSIAN AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ, ENCIK K.N.NADARAJAH, WHO WAS ON LEAVE IN MALAYSIA, HAD BEEN DIRECTED TO RETURN TO BAGHDAD, THE IRAQI CAPITAL.

+AS WE HAVE TO HANDLE VARIOUS MATTERS INVOLVING OUR CITIZENS IN KUWAIT AND IRAQ, WE HAVE DIRECTED THE AMBASSADOR TO RETURN THERE IMMEDIATELY,+ HE SAID.

REPLYING TO A QUESTION, HE SAID THE FOREIGN MINISTRY HAD PREPARED A CONTINGENCY PLAN, WHICH INCLUDED SENDING A SPECIAL AIRCRAFT, TO BRING HOME THE MALAYSIANS. -- MORE
1446MST 11 08 90

MAHATHIR-SADDAM 3 KUALA LUMPUR

ON MALAYSIANS IN OTHER GULF COUNTRIES, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THE GOVERNMENT HAD NOT INSTRUCTED THEM TO LEAVE THOSE COUNTRIES.

+IF WE FIND THE SITUATION GETTING MORE TENSE OR IF THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT OTHER GULF COUNTRIES WILL BE ATTACKED, WE WILL ACT IMMEDIATELY TO BRING THEM HOME,+ HE SAID.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID NO COUNTRY IN THE WORLD HAD EXPECTED IRAQ TO INVADE KUWAIT AND NONE OF THEM WERE ABLE TO GET THEIR CITIZENS OUT IN TIME.

HE SAID MALAYSIA WAS NOT THE ONLY COUNTRY WHICH WAS SHOCKED AND UNABLE TO ACT. EVEN THE UNITED STATES, WITH ITS VAST CAPABILITIES IN THE FIELD OF INTELLIGENCE, HAD NO WARNING OF THE IRAQI INVASION.

AFTER THE NEWS CONFERENCE, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MET ABOUT 30 RELATIVES OF THE STRANDED MALAYSIANS. -- MORE
1520MST 11 08 90

D121

R E904 AAE
MAHATHIR-SADDAM 4 KUALA LUMPUR

HE ASSURED THEM THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS STRIVING TO BRING HOME THEIR RELATIVES ALTHOUGH IT FACED TELECOMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES.

HE SAID THE GOVERNMENT PLACED FULL RESPONSIBILITY ON THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT FOR THE SAFETY OF MALAYSIANS IN IRAQ AND KUWAIT.

ON THE SUGGESTION THAT THE GOVERNMENT SEND A SPECIAL AIRCRAFT TO BRING HOME THE MALAYSIANS, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THIS WOULD BE DONE IF IRAQ ALLOWED THE PLANE TO USE ITS AIR SPACE.

HE EXPLAINED THAT NO FLIGHTS COULD BE MADE TO IRAQ, NOT BECAUSE THE AIRPORT THERE WAS CLOSED BUT BECAUSE THE AREA WAS NOW A WAR ZONE.

+IF WE HAVE IRAQ'S APPROVAL, WE WILL SEND THE PLANE. BUT RIGHT NOW WE NO LONGER HAVE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH KUWAIT BECAUSE IRAQ CONSIDERS OUR EMBASSY IN KUWAIT AS HAVING NO STATUS,+ HE SAID. -- MORE

1538MST 11 08 90

D125

R E905 AAE
MAHATHIR-SADDAM 5 KUALA LUMPUR

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR APPEALED TO THE RELATIVES TO REMAIN CALM IN FACE OF THE UNFORESEEN INCIDENT.

HE ALSO GAVE THE ASSURANCE THAT THE MALAYSIAN EMBASSY IN IRAQ WOULD NOT BE CLOSED SO LONG AS THERE WERE MALAYSIANS STRANDED THERE, AND SAID THE EMBASSY OFFICIALS WOULD BE THE LAST TO RETURN HOME.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THE MEMBERS OF THE UMNO SUPREME COUNCIL DELIBERATED AT LENGTH ON THE GULF CRISIS, AND URGED THE GOVERNMENT TO GIVE PRIORITY ATTENTION TO THE SAFETY OF MALAYSIANS IN KUWAIT AND IRAQ.

THE GROUP OF RELATIVES, LED BY LAWYER MOHAMED ZAID IBRAHIM, HANDED A LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER APPEALING TO THE GOVERNMENT TO STRIVE HARD TO BRING HOME THE STRANDED.

THEY ALSO HANDED A LETTER TO THE BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER HERE, SIR NICHOLAS SPRECKLEY, APPEALING TO BRITAIN'S GOOD OFFICES TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF PASSENGERS ON BOARD BRITISH AIRWAYS FLIGHT BA149 TO KUALA LUMPUR WHICH WAS GROUNDED IN KUWAIT CITY DUE TO THE IRAQI INVASION. FORTY-NINE OF THE PASSENGERS ARE MALAYSIANS. --