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tween these two countries and Malaysia since the Iraqi invasion.

In this context, he added, the Government had directed Malaysian Ambassador to Baghdad K.N. Nagarajah, who was on leave here, to return to Iraq yesterday to handle the various arrangements, including evacuation plans.

On the safety of Malaysians in Kuwait and Iraq, he said Iraqi Ambassador to Malaysia Hisham Fakhri Al-Tabaqchali was unable to give any information on them.

However, he said that Malaysia was able to get confirmation through the Swedish embassy in Kuwait that all Malaysians were safe and well.

Briefing the families of the stranded Malaysians, Dr Mahathir appealed to them to be calm while efforts were being carried out to bring them home.

As far as their well-being was concerned, he assured them that Malaysia had made it clear to the Iraqi Government that it was responsible for the safety and well-being of the Malaysians.

He also said the Malaysian embassy in Kuwait would not be closed as long as there were Malaysians stranded there, although Iraq yesterday directed all foreign missions to close by Aug 24.

Dr Mahathir also explained to the relatives why the Government could not bring home their loved ones before the Iraqi invasion last Friday.

He said Malaysia was caught off-guard just like other countries, including the US, which, despite its sophisticated intelligence network, did not have advance warning of the Iraqi move to invade Kuwait.

Dr Mahathir also explained that Malaysia could not simply despatch an aircraft to Kuwait or Iraq as it was now considered a war zone.

"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."

On the progress of the evacuation plans, Dr Mahathir said Baghdad had not responded to Malaysia's request to evacuate Malaysians from Kuwait and Iraq.

He said arrangements for the evacuation were being made difficult by the breakdown in telecommunication links between Kuwait and Iraq and be-

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sians stranded in Kuwait. They were led by lawyer Zaid Ibrahim.

The Prime Minister said he would consider the request by Encik Abu Hashim Abu Bakar, one of the representatives, to use his ties with Palestine Liberation Organisation chairman Yasser Arafat and King Hussein of Jordan to get them to persuade President Saddam to allow the evacuation of Malaysians.

Asked if he felt it was advisable to bring home Malaysians from the Gulf region in view of the possibility of the Kuwaiti crisis spreading to Saudi Arabia and other States, the Prime Minister said:

World Trade Centre, Dr Mahathir who is the party president, said he would make every effort to bring home the Malaysians in Kuwait and Iraq.

"There has been a suggestion that I speak with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. Well, if he can be contacted and wants to speak to me, I am willing — we will try any effort to get our people back here," he said.

"However, all communications with the Iraqis are only between the embassy in Baghdad and the Iraqi Foreign Ministry."

Dr Mahathir later briefed 36 representatives and relatives of Malay-

PM: No plans to evacuate Malaysians from Gulf yet

By SABRY SHARIF

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said that he did not plan yet to order Malaysians to leave the other Gulf states as the situation there was not as alarming as in Kuwait and Iraq.

The Prime Minister also said he was prepared to direct Malaysia Airlines to charter an aircraft to bring home Malaysians from Kuwait and Iraq if permission was given by the Iraqis.

Speaking after a three-hour Umno supreme council meeting at the Putra

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