

KL urges Iraq to pull out from Kuwait immediately-

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By BT REPORTERS

MALAYSIA urged Iraq yesterday to take heed of the call of the international community and withdraw immediately and unconditionally from Kuwait before January 15 next year.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad made the call in a statement issued in Kuala Lumpur in conjunction with Malaysia's support for United Nations Security Council Resolution 678 authorising UN members to use all necessary means to implement previous resolutions condemning Iraq's August 2 invasion of Kuwait and demanding its withdrawal from the emirate.

The resolution, at the historic meeting of the 15-nation Council, was voted for by 12 members, with Cuba and Yemen voting against, and China abstaining.

The Prime Minister said it is Malaysia's hope that the use of force can be avoided.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir also called on the US to show serious concern for the rights of the Palestinians and to move towards a just and even-handed approach to the various issues affecting West Asia.

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At a news conference at the Putra World Trade Centre, at the end of the first day of the Umno general assembly in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, the Prime Minister said: "The ball is at the feet of the Iraqis. They needed only 24 hours to seize Kuwait but the Security Council has given them 45 days to withdraw."

He said Malaysia's support for the resolution is with the "reservation" that the Security Council will give similar attention and action to resolving the Palestinian problem.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said Malaysia is totally against the invasion of a sovereign country by another. The decision to support the UN resolution reflects the country's stand.

"We are against the invasion of Cambodia by Vietnam, the US invasion of Granada and Panama, and Israel's continued occupation of Palestine," he said.

The Prime Minister explained that the Israel-Palestine crisis cannot be linked with the Iraq-Kuwait issue as to do so will mean taking a longer time to solve the Kuwaiti issue. This will mean the people living in occupied-Kuwait will have to endure prolonged sufferings.

In this respect, he said, if Malaysia were occupied by another country, the people would not like to see its allies resort to pressures like economic sanctions which would take a long time to succeed.

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"He added that economic sanctions can also bring misery to the people of occupied-Kuwait.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said Saudi Arabia has the right to invite foreign military personnel, from the US, France and the UK, to defend its land as no Arab or Muslim army has the might to challenge the Iraqi army.

Malaysia, he added, would do the same if it were threatened. In the past it had received military aid from its allies.

Bernama adds: Foreign Minister Datuk Abu Hassan Omar, in casting the Malaysian vote at the council's meeting in New York yesterday, said it had not been an easy decision for the country.

"Malaysia prays to the Almighty Allah that we have taken the right decision, that in the final analysis, in discharging our responsibilities, we are underlying the determination of the international community to push back aggression and restore Kuwait," he said.

Malaysia, Datuk Abu Hassan said, must be underlined that this resolution does not provide a blank cheque for excessive and indiscriminate use of force.

"The authorisation of force, in the eventuality that Iraq does not comply within the timeframe specified, can only be taken under the terms of the United Nations Charter."

Insisting on the centrality of the UN role in the maintenance of international

peace and security, he said any proposed use of force must be brought before the council for its prior approval, in accordance with the specific provisions of the charter.

Expressing Malaysia's regret that this point was not clearly reflected in the resolution, he said a precedent might not bode well for the future.

"When the UN Security Council provides the authorisation for countries to use force, these countries are fully accountable for their actions to the council through a clear system of reporting and accountability," he added.

Datuk Abu Hassan later told Malaysian journalists in New York that President Bush had on November 20 called Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who was then on leave in Japan, suggesting that the foreign minister meet with US Secretary of State James Baker.

Last Saturday, Datuk Abu Hassan met Mr Baker in Los Angeles where the latter "pleaded" for Malaysia's support for the resolution.

Mr Baker also apologised for the congressional withdrawal of the US\$1 million (US\$1 = M\$2.69) aid to Malaysia for military training.

Datuk Abu Hassan said the US, however, did not promise anything in return for support of the resolution.

They did not offer and we did not ask. We have our price," he added.