

19/02/1998

Abdullah: Diplomacy best option

Kamarul Yunus

REITERATING that diplomacy is the best option to ensure Iraq's compliance with UN Security Council resolutions, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Malaysia lauded the pending visit by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to Baghdad.

"Malaysia wholeheartedly welcomes the pending visit by Kofi Annan to Baghdad and attaches great importance to this visit," he told reporters after meeting Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Abdullah said diplomacy is the only option that is realistic and no other option should be contemplated, adding that he had explained Malaysia's position on the Iraqi crisis to Surin.

"Malaysia remains opposed to any military strike as such actions would not achieve their stated objective. Instead, there is a need for continuous and concerted efforts to find a diplomatic solution.

"There is the ever present danger that should a strike take place, it may unleash unparalleled environmental damage that is difficult to anticipate. It may also impinge on the overall political and security equilibrium," he said.

The US has threatened to take military action against Iraq over President Saddam Hussein's refusal to allow UN weapons inspectors into some sites suspected of housing banned chemical and biological weapons.

At the same time, Abdullah said Malaysia also reiterates its position that Iraq should fully comply and implement all relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

In this regard, he said Malaysia is pleased with the efforts by France, Russia and China to work towards a diplomatic solution to ensure Iraq's compliance with the resolutions and which should lead to an early lifting of sanctions on Iraq.

"Malaysia takes note that the UN Special Commission (Unscm) for disarming Iraq has made progress in some areas, and urges that it remains not only neutral but also provides an objective, comprehensive and fair assessment of its work.

"In carrying out its mandate, Unscm must respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and dignity of Iraq," he added.

Abdullah said Malaysia views positively the ideas contained in the initiative of French President Jacques Chirac as conveyed to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and himself by France's special envoy Denis Bouchard on Tuesday.

"We hope that it will provide elements for a peaceful resolution to the current crisis between Iraq and Unscm," he said.

Meanwhile, Surin said Thailand is seeking Malaysia's assistance to enable it to participate in the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) as an observer.

"With this status in the OIC, the Thai Government can explain and provide correct information about its policy towards the religion and the commitment to develop border areas together with Malaysia and Indonesia," he said, adding that he had also discussed the matter with Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Al-Atas on Tuesday.

Abdullah said Surin has expressed Thailand's keen interest to participate as an observer in a regional meeting on Islamic subjects which involves Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia.

"Thailand feels that it should also participate (in the regional meeting involving the four Asean countries)," he said.

In Thailand, the Muslim community is mostly found in the south, especially areas bordering Malaysia.

(END)