

22/02/1998

Dr M hopes Annan succeeds in finding solution to Iraqi stand-off

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he hoped United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan would succeed in his bid to seek a solution to the stand-off in Iraq over arms inspection.

However, Dr Mahathir who reiterated Malaysia's opposition to any form of military action against Iraq, said it appeared that the build-up for an attack has intensified."

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters at the Kongsu Raya gathering of the Prime Minister's Department yesterday.

Annan arrived in Baghdad on yesterday and is due to remain there until Monday in efforts to seek a solution.

Dr Mahathir said he had also conveyed Malaysia's opposition to any form of military action to the personal representative of the French President who met him recently to inform him of France's stand, and to seek Malaysia's views on the Iraqi crisis.

"We also believe that if the palace is to be inspected, the arms inspectors have to be neutral and not those who declare that they are enemies of Iraq.

"People who declare they are enemies (of Iraq) certainly cannot be allowed to go in and inspect ... because you may not only find out where the weapons are held, you may find out other things like private quarters.

"Nobody wants to reveal where his hiding place is, for example."

On Iraq's offer to give access to eight presidential compounds it previously declared off limits, the Prime Minister said Iraq had said the arms inspectors had to be neutral.

Earlier, after opening the annual general meeting of the People's Progressive Party, Dr Mahathir was asked about the economic situation in Indonesia and the plans by its government. He replied that Indonesia is an independent country and has the right to do what it wishes, adding that the currency board plan is also within its rights to decide.

(END)