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Envoy-Iraq

FRANCE SUPPORTS KOFI ANNAN VISIT TO BAGHDAD

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 17 (Bernama) -- France is strongly supporting the visit by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan to seek a diplomatic solution to the Iraqi crisis.

French special envoy to Iraq Denis Bauchard said he wished that Annan would go to Baghdad as soon as possible.

"We think Saddam could make some new proposal to Annan," he told reporters at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport before leaving for New Delhi to continue his diplomatic mission.

Bauchard, who arrived from Islamabad, met Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad to explain position of the French government and its efforts to promote a diplomatic solution to the Iraqi crisis.

Washington has threatened to bomb Iraq over President Saddam Hussein's refusal to allow U.N. weapons inspectors into sites suspected of housing banned chemical and biological weapons.

Bauchard said that based on diplomatic sources, there were countries such as United Kingdom which were moving towards a more pragmatic and flexible position.

Asked about his meeting with Dr Mahathir earlier, he said he gave the prime minister a personal letter from President Jacques Chirac on France's position on the crisis.

"I visit Malaysia for different reasons because we are friends of Malaysia. Malaysia plays an important role between countries of the South like hosting the G-15 meeting." -- BERNAMA

RV Jk