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French envoy puts forward country's stand on Iraqi crisis

PETALING JAYA, Tues - French special envoy Denis Bauchard today had a meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to put forward France's position on a diplomatic solution to the Iraqi crisis.

Bauchard said Dr Mahathir had positive comments but declined to give details of the discussions.

Speaking at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport before leaving for New Delhi, Bauchard said he also gave the Prime Minister a personal letter from President Jacques Chirac on France's position on the crisis.

He declined to disclose the contents of the letter.

Asked what Dr Mahathir's response was, Bauchard said: "I am going to say it was very positive."

The ambassador-at-large is on a three-nation tour and arrived this morning after visiting Islamabad.

The US has threatened a military strike at Iraq over President Saddam Hussein's refusal to allow United Nations weapons inspectors free access to sites suspected of storing chemical and biological weapons.

Bauchard also said that France supported a visit to Baghdad by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to seek a diplomatic solution to the stand-off.

French ambassador Eduoard Braine, who was also present, said Bauchard also called on Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and the ministry's undersecretary for West Asia, Africa and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference Datuk Deva Mohd Ridzam.

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