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French envoy conveys Paris' stand on Iraqi crisis to Dr M

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FRANCE'S special envoy to Iraq, Mr Denis Bauchard, briefed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on his country's stand on a diplomatic solution to the Iraqi crisis yesterday.

Dr Mahathir responded positively, Bauchard told reporters after his half-hour meeting with the Prime Minister before leaving for New Delhi to continue his mission.

He gave the Prime Minister a personal letter from President Jacques Chirac on France's position on the Iraqi situation

"I gave a letter from President Chirac. However, the essence of the letter is personal and I cannot discuss the letter. It does contain France's position on the matter.

"I visit Malaysia for different reasons. We are friends of Malaysia. Malaysia plays an important role between countries of the South, for example, hosting the G-15 meeting," Bauchard said.

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

France is strongly supporting the visit by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan to seek a diplomatic solution to the Iraqi crisis.

Bauchard said he wished that Annan will go to Baghdad as soon as possible, adding that "we think Saddam could make some new proposal to Annan".

It was reported that Annan on Monday said that he was close to deciding if he would go to Baghdad but needed another meeting of the five permanent UN Security Council members to arrive at common proposals.

Bauchard said a search is under way for a pragmatic and flexible solution to the crisis with Iraq.

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