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Mahathir-Iraq

M'SIA HOPES ANNAN RESOLVES IRAQ-UN STAND-OFF

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 21 (Bernama) -- Malaysia hopes that talks between United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan and president Saddam Hussein will successfully defuse the UN stand off with Baghdad over UN inspection of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

However, in expressing such hope Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the current United States-led military build-up in the Gulf was pointing towards an all-out strike against Iraq.

"I hope he (Annan) will succeed," Dr Mahathir said when approached by reporters on the crisis after attending a joint Hari Raya and Chinese New Year reception organised by the Prime Minister's Department at Kelab Perdana here today.

Annan is now in Baghdad on a mission described as a last ditch effort to avert a military solution to the Iraqi stand off with UN weapons inspectors.

But US president Bill Clinton had warned Arabs that if Annan fails, air raid casualties will be the fault of president Saddam Hussein.

Asked about Malaysia's latest stand on the Gulf conflict, Dr Mahathir said : "We're still against a military solution (to the problem)."

The UN-Iraq stand-off was sparked off by Baghdad defiantly denying access to UN inspectors to check eight presidential sites for weapons of mass destruction.

The prime minister said Malaysia believed that it was improper for a team wishing to inspect the off-limit sites to comprise those who are pronouncedly enemies of Iraq.

Dr Mahathir said he had conveyed Malaysia's stand on the matter to Denis Bauchard, a personal envoy of French president Jacques Chirac who was here last week to seek Kuala Lumpur's views on the conflict.

"We believe that presidential palaces should be inspected by a neutral body and not people who are expressedly adversarial to Iraq," Dr Mahathir added. --  
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