

24 FEB 1998

LEAD Mahathir-Iraq

MALAYSIA HOPES UN LIFTS SANCTIONS ON IRAQ

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 24 (Bernama) -- Malaysia hopes the economic sanctions on Iraq imposed more than seven years ago would be lifted with the United Nations-Iraq accord on arms inspections.

Asked by reporters whether UN economic sanctions against Iraq should be withdrawn following the latest development, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he hoped the sanctions would be lifted.

"But I feel there will be other excuses for not lifting the economic sanctions," he said when met after his visit to the Technology Park Malaysia here today.

Dr Mahathir's comments came in wake of a news report from Riyadh today that the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) had called for the lifting of the sanctions soon.

The report said the 54-member OIC also welcomed the accord which UN secretary general Kofi Annan signed with Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz in Baghdad yesterday.

The report also quoted Saudi Arabia's Prince Saud al-Faisal as saying that he hoped the accord would "lead to the implementation of UN resolutions ... and the lifting of the sanctions imposed on the Iraqi people."

UN sanctions, in force since Baghdad's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait, cannot be scrapped until UN weapons inspectors have eliminated Iraq's capacity to build weapons of mass destruction.

In welcoming the accord, Dr Mahathir hoped that it would be acceptable to the various parties.

"We are relieved that an agreement has been concluded," he said.

Asked whether the United States and Britain, Washington's closest ally in the crisis, should refrain from using military force being marshalled in the Gulf region, Dr Mahathir said he felt that they should not threaten to attack Iraq.

"But I feel the threats will continue. It's my opinion...I may be wrong," he added. -- BERNAMA

ES rn