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Abdullah-Iraq

MALAYSIA LAUDS KOFI ANNAN'S VISIT TO BAGHDAD

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 18 (Bernama) -- Malaysia wholeheartedly welcomes the impending visit of United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan to Baghdad and attaches great importance to the visit, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

He said Malaysia remained opposed to any military strike as such action would not achieve their stated objective and urged Iraq to fully comply and implement all relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

"Malaysia wishes to reiterate that diplomacy is the only option that is realistic and no other action should be contemplated...there is a need for continuous and concerted effort to find a diplomatic solution," he said in his statement read at a news conference today.

In this regard, he said Malaysia was pleased with the effort by France, Russia and China to work towards a diplomatic solution to ensure Iraqi compliance with the Security Council resolutions which would lead to an early lifting of sanctions on the country.

The foreign minister said Malaysia viewed positively the ideas contained in the initiative of French President Jacques Chirac which was conveyed yesterday in a personal letter to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad delivered by Chirac's special envoy Denis Bauchard.

"We hope that it would provide elements for a peaceful resolution to the current crisis between Iraq and UNSCOM," he said.

Before his departure for India yesterday evening, Bauchard said France supported a visit by the UN secretary-general to Baghdad to seek a diplomatic solution.

Abdullah said in carrying out its mandate, the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) vested with the task searching for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq must respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and dignity of that country.

"Malaysia takes note that UNSCOM had made progress in some areas and urges that it remains not only neutral but also provides an objective, comprehensive and fair assessment of its work," he said.

Abdullah also said that there was the ever present danger that should a strike takes place, it might unleash unparallel environmental damage that was difficult to anticipate and it might also impinge on the overall political and security equilibrium. -- BERNAMA

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