

11 MAY 1999

Iraq-Malaysia

IRAQ SAYS M'SIA CAN PLAY POSITIVE ROLE IN REMOVING SANCTIONS

KUALA LUMPUR, May 11 (Bernama) -- Iraq today expressed confidence that Malaysia will play a positive role in the United Nations Security Council to ensure that economic sanctions against Baghdad are lifted.

Iraqi vice-president Taha Yasseen Ramadhan said that Malaysia, as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, has assured his country that it would do its best towards that end.

Speaking at a news conference here Taha said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad assured him that Malaysia's position has always been to support Iraq in its bid to get the nine-year old UN sanctions lifted.

"Today he (Dr Mahathir) stressed the same position and pledged to help Iraq get the sanctions lifted," said Taha after talks with Dr Mahathir at the Prime Minister's Department here.

The UN had imposed sanctions on Iraq after Baghdad invaded Kuwait in 1990.

Taha, 60, who is on a four-day visit, is the highest ranking Iraqi leader to visit Malaysia since Kuala Lumpur and Baghdad established diplomatic ties 35 years ago.

Taha, who is also a member of the Revolutionary Command Council, Iraq's top decision-making body, said Dr Mahathir was also supportive of the removal of the US-imposed no-fly zone over northern and southern Iraq.

During his meeting with Dr Mahathir, Taha said, he forwarded a written message from President Saddam Hussein to the prime minister.

In the message Saddam said he was happy to note the friendly bilateral ties between Iraq and Malaysia and looked forward to enhancing them in future, said Taha.

On his visit here, the Iraqi leader said he was very satisfied with the results and was impressed with the cooperation given by Malaysian officials.

He said the Iraq-Malaysia Joint Ministerial Commission would meet soon to discuss long-term cooperation especially in oil production, education and trade.

The two countries also agreed to increase visits by leaders and officials at all levels and in all fields, he said.

On air strikes by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) against Yugoslavia, Taha said that Nato, led by the United States, was conducting a dangerous role.

He said Nato was supposed to play the role of a defender and not that of an aggressor.

Taha said the US was using Nato to justify its attack against Yugoslavia after failing to get the endorsement of the UN Security Council.

Taha called on countries to condemn Nato's acts of aggression.

-- BERNAMA

ES RYN