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Abdullah to stress role of UN

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DEPUTY Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who arrives here today will call for a multilateral and holistic approach to the fight against terrorism in his address to the United Nations on Saturday.

His statement to the 57th UN General Assembly would focus on the issues of terrorism, the imminent war against Iraq and Palestine.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, who arrived here on Tuesday from Cuba, said Abdullah will express Malaysia's stand that the UN must be the mechanism to resolve differences.

"There should never be a unilateral act by a country or group of countries, as this could undermine the credibility of the UN," he said yesterday.

Syed Hamid said the issue of Iraq must be handled with care as it could create instability in the Muslim world which may perceive military action as an injustice.

If unilateral action was taken by the United States against Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, it would set a bad precedent of bringing about a regime change from the outside.

"It is not good for the future of global peace and stability. We hope that the US will take heed, and pay attention to the dissenting voices because we must have respect for international law and UN. The credibility of the UN should not be undermined," he said.

Syed Hamid said a war against Iraq would also detract from the real fight against terrorism, and distract from the continuing need to support war-torn Afghanistan.

He said Malaysia still wanted an international conference to be held under the auspices of the UN to thoroughly discuss terrorism including its root causes, so that there could be an agreed convention on combating terrorism.

The principle of multilateralism must be the way forward to tackle international problems, he said.

The question of Palestine will also be addressed by Abdullah who will reiterate the call for an international protection force to stabilise the region.

Syed Hamid said if the Palestinians were expected to take action for peace, Israel should also be equally proactive to take action for stability.

"This is an opportunity for Malaysia to express its views on the many international issues that are currently being debated," he said.

Abdullah is also expected to hold a meeting with Iraqi Foreign Minister Naji Sabri at the latter's request, and a separate meeting with the Foreign Minister of Papua New Guinea.

He will leave on Monday for Washington DC where he will have meetings with Vice-President Dick Cheney; Tom Ridge, director of homeland security, and Condoleezza Rice, National Security Adviser.

The issue of terrorism and Iraq are expected to dominate these meetings.

He will also speak to the Malaysian caucus, a group of American Senate members who understand Malaysia. The caucus was established during Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's visit to the US earlier this year.