STAR 19 FEB 2003

Qatar agrees to informal OIC meet after NAM talks

PUTRAJAYA: Qatar, the current chairman of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), has agreed to Malaysia's proposal to hold an informal meeting on the sidelines of the 13th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit next week to discuss an imminent US-led attack on Iraq.

The word of support came on Monday following talks between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the Emir of Qatar Amir Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani.

And in an immediate response, several OIC countries have agreed to attend the meeting on Feb 26.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the meeting would be a free-wheeling discussion among OIC members.

"The meeting is just to discuss the imminent attack and the impact should there be a war. It will become a brainstorming prior to the emergency OIC summit in Qatar.

"It will be useful to talk to each other and it is going to be very informal," he said yesterday.

Syed Hamid said Dr Mahathir had written to OIC member countries, including those which were not NAM members, inviting them to attend the informal meeting, adding that Wisma Putra had also called ambassadors from the organisation on Kuala Lumpur's intention to hold it.

Earlier, speaking to reporters after presentation of books titled *Portrait of a Nation* and *Malaysia's New Economic*

● TURN TO PAGE 6

Syed Hamid: Many OIC members want meeting

STAR 19 FEB 2003

● FROM PAGE 1

Policy – An Overview to be distributed to NAM delegates, Syed Hamid said Qatar had also requested for support for its plan to hold an emergency OIC summit in accordance with the organisation's charter to discuss the Middle East crisis and other current issues affecting the Muslim community.

He said Qatar had yet to fix a date for the emergency summit to be held in Doha.

Syed Hamid said Qatar's change of stance on the proposed informal meeting was due to requests by many OIC members who considered the issue an urgent matter that needed immediate attention by the organisation.

"Most agreed that we need this informal meeting because so far, the OIC has not articulated its view on the proposed US-led war on Iraq."

Qatar had initially disagreed to Malaysia's plan to call for the informal meeting.

Syed Hamid also said the talks would be outside the ambit of the OIC charter and, thus, there would be no resolution or declaration.

He said it was being held to take advantage of the attendance of many OIC leaders at the NAM Summit. Of the 114 NAM members, 50 are OIC nations.