

M'sia won't attend Madrid talks

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BANGKOK: Malaysia will not be attending the Madrid Conference on the reconstruction of Iraq on Friday despite being invited by the United States.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Malaysia was not in a financial position to be able to make a contribution towards the process of rebuilding of Iraq.

"We will continue with what we have been doing, namely by involvement with our non-government organisations for humanitarian assistance."

He said this was conveyed to US Secretary of State Colin Powell during their 30-minute bilateral meeting held at the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation Summit here yesterday.

The Madrid Conference aims to come up with a framework for international involvement to boost the reconstruction process in Iraq. It will also seek financial contributions from countries for the process.

Besides being involved through NGOs, Syed Hamid, who spoke to

reporters after his meeting with Powell, said the Organisation of Islamic Conference might consider sending a mission to Iraq in the future to interact with Iraqi leaders when the situation there became clearer.

Asked whether the United States had asked Malaysia to send troops to Iraq, he said there was no such request as any sending of troops would be done under the United Nations.

Syed Hamid said one of the issues brought up during the meeting was Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's opening speech at the OIC.

"He (Powell) said he took the trouble to read the whole speech. He agrees that the bulk of it had a lot of good things and ideas, but there were only one or two parts which he says sent signals which would make people react," he said.

Syed Hamid said he told Powell that the speech had to be looked at as a whole.

"In fact, it was critical of Muslims and he was taking a great risk with the Muslims by being very critical of them," he said, adding that Dr

Mahathir had to create a balance by looking at the issue from a historical context.

He said if one was to look at the speech positively, Dr Mahathir actually asked Muslims to look at what the Jews had achieved, which was a very difficult thing to do.

On the inclusion of security issues in Apec, Syed Hamid said he explained to Powell Malaysia's position on the matter by saying that it did not want Apec to be sidetracked from economic matters.

He said Malaysia understood that security had an impact on economics and trade, but there would be a problem with any inclusion of elements which would make Apec a security mechanism.

"I think security issues should be done at a bilateral or national level of each country. Then it will be easier," he said.

He also assured Powell that current Malaysian policies would continue after Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi took over as Prime Minister.