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NAM-Mahathir (OIC)

MAHATHIR TO ATTEND OIC EMERGENCY MEETING IN QATAR

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 23 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that he will be attending the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) emergency meeting scheduled to be held in Doha, Qatar, on March 4 and 5.

The meeting, called by Qatar as the current OIC chair, is expected to focus on the problem of Iraq which is facing the threat of war from the United States and its allies.

"I have to attend because we are holding the (informal OIC) meeting here with the agreement of Qatar and if it invites us, we have to be present," the prime minister said.

He told reporters this after bilateral meetings with seven leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) nations who are attending the 13th NAM Summit here tomorrow and on Tuesday.

Malaysia, as host of the NAM Summit, has taken the initiative to organise the informal discussion next Wednesday to take advantage of the presence of the OIC countries, which are also NAM members, here. Fifty of the 114 NAM members are OIC countries.

Asked about the fact that he would be on leave during the OIC emergency meeting, Dr Mahathir said that he would definitely attend the meeting.

"I have to defer my leave, replace it later," said the prime minister who will be on two months' leave from March 1.

On his bilateral meetings with the NAM leaders at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) here, he said they mostly focused on NAM's future and what the movement must do to face the current challenges.

Dr Mahathir said he was also briefed by South African President Thabo Mbeki, who will be handing over the NAM chair to Malaysia, on what his country had done so that Malaysia could carry on with the work.

"President Mbeki wants NAM to be further streamlined and feels that we must have 'consultations' in New York, Geneva and the WTO (World Trade Organisation) so that we can have a common stand," he said.

The other leaders that Dr Mahathir met were Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, Nepalese Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand, Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Sir Michael T. Somare.

On the statement on Iraq which was approved by the NAM foreign ministers at their meeting yesterday, Dr Mahathir said that at the bilateral meetings, all the heads of state and government supported the statement.

"They all supported our coming out with the 'Statement on Iraq' and some even felt that we should be more firm," he said.

The ministerial meeting of the NAM Summit was reported to have reached a consensus on the Iraqi issue and the statement, according to the officials, included NAM's advice to Iraq to abide by the United Nations Security Council resolution 1441 which calls for the disarmament of Iraq.

-- BERNAMA

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