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OIC-Wrap

OIC STANDS UNITED TO REJECT WAR AGAINST IRAQ

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

DOHA, March 6 (Bernama) -- The Islamic new year passed by quietly in this reputedly richest country on Earth as Islamic leaders arrived for a special meeting on Wednesday to discuss the mounting concern of an imminent war against Iraq.

Seeking to avert a looming United States-led war against the fellow Muslim country, the one-day Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) extraordinary meeting was seen as a last-ditch effort to find ways of giving peace a chance to settle the crisis.

Held against a backdrop of uncertainty on the number of leaders coming for the meeting, seen as a reflection of their commitment, the summit ended on a high note with member countries agreeing that there should not be any attack on Iraq while remaining committed to the Palestinian cause.

The meeting has also thwarted the question of 'regime change' when it rejected any attempt to impose changes in the region or interfering in its internal affairs.

Although it was not on the agenda, a proposal that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein step down and go into exile as a way to avoid an attack on his country has received attention on the sidelines among diplomats.

The idea was earlier raised by United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan at the Arab League summit over the weekend and subsequently taken up at a meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) foreign ministers here on Monday.

Even if the idea has been tabled, it would have not received the backing of a large number of the 57-member OIC countries including Malaysia. Even OIC secretary-general Abdulwahed Belqaziz noted that after Iraq, other Islamic countries would face the same question of being pressured for a regime change.

Speaking to reporters on the outcome of the meeting yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that the pressure for a regime change was not new although it may take a different form.

"Previously, they only went so far as to use economic power, for instance, they succeeded in their attempt to change the government in Indonesia by turning Indonesia into a poor nation which is forced to accept conditional aid, that is there must be a regime change.

"Will other countries, after Iraq, if there is a regime change following military action, not be faced with such a problem, for a regime change to be instituted," he said.

While suggestion that Saddam's departure could resolve the crisis, Iraqi Foreign Minister Naji Sabri thought that the conflict could be averted if US President George W. Bush resigns.

"Yes, if Mr Bush steps down and leave the world to live in peace and leave his country to be respected in the world instead of being isolated and hated all over the world, being public enemy number one," he told reporters on the sidelines of the meeting here.

War on Iraq would definitely have an effect and even to countries outside the region.

Millions of workers from the Indian sub-continent and as far as the Philippines and Indonesia are working in the Gulf states and they remit billion of dollars to their respective countries.

Bordered by Saudi Arabia and UAE in the south and Bahrain in the northwest, Qatar is situated half way on the western shore of the Arabian

gulf. Rich in oil and gas, Qatar has a population of 600,000 people with less than 200,000 citizens while the rest are foreign workers.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said that the meeting had come up with a united stand that they do not want war.

"We are not against anybody but for peace and I think you cannot look at the lives of human beings as collaterals," he said.

"The Muslim countries, if they want honour and dignity, need to show a united front. I think we still have the ability and capability to stop war provided we have a united front," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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