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OIC-Mahathir (Summit)

OIC SUMMIT TO GO ON IN OCTOBER, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 26 (Bernama) -- The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit to be hosted by Malaysia in October would go on as scheduled, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said it was not true that the summit would be scrapped.

Dr Mahathir said this at a press conference after chairing an informal meeting of OIC members that followed a highly successful summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

"Not true," he said when a reporter asked for his comment on a rumour that the summit would not take place.

The prime minister, who will be attending an OIC emergency meeting in Qatar next week, also said he did not think that the 57-member organisation was irrelevant.

"I think OIC is still (relevant); despite its many weaknesses has some degree of influence. So, we will have to work on how to strengthen the OIC," he said. His deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar were also present at the media conference.

The informal meeting was attended by 51 OIC members, including two non-NAM members.

Malaysia initiated the informal consultation to take advantage of the presence of many OIC leaders at the NAM Summit, which ended last night.

It was aimed at getting the views of OIC members regarding the present situation in Palestine and the possibility of a United States-led war on Iraq.

"We are all of the same view with regard to both the Palestine and Iraq... We would like to find ways and means to put a stop to the killings of Palestinians by the Israelis and also we would like to see that Iraq is not invaded by foreign forces," said Dr Mahathir.

The meeting also agreed that Iraq should comply fully with the request by the United Nations arms inspectors for any inspection of the possibility of weapons of mass destruction which may be kept by Iraq.

He said Baghdad had denied that it had weapons of mass destruction and kept its invitation open for anyone wishing to go to Iraq to see for themselves.

"The members of the OIC do not doubt, and they don't see the need at the moment for them to go (to Iraq) and verify," he said.

However, he said they were still afraid that should the accusers be unable to produce proof that Iraq possessed those weapons, then Iraq might be accused of hiding the weapons and the consequence was that it would be attacked.

Under that situation, the OIC members generally agreed that they should make common cause with countries that were against waging war on Iraq, particularly European countries such as France, Germany, Belgium and Russia.

"We hope that by making common cause with them, we would be able to exert some influence on the United States," he said.

There had also been a suggestion that the member countries looked at the possibility of using their oil wealth to exert pressure, he said.

"How this can be done is something else but there was a consensus as to the need for us to think about this thing.

"This is something very dangerous, as some said it may cause a lot of

repercussions but if we do not think about it, we will not be able to exert some influence in our favour," he said.

He said that by and large, they agreed that they should try to influence as many people as possible.

"There was a suggestion that I should write in my capacity as chairman of NAM as well as chairman of this meeting to the Security Council, members of the Security Council, (and) the European Union to urge them to avoid war against Iraq," he said.

Asked about the emergency meeting in Doha on March 4 and 5, Dr Mahathir said the main issues would still be Palestine and Iraq.

"I gather that the majority of OIC members are willing to attend, and Malaysia will go along with the other members," said Dr Mahathir, who has decided to attend the meeting although he will be on leave at that time.

-- BERNAMA

AZZ YBY