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OIC-Qatar

QATAR STRESSES NEED TO MAINTAIN IRAQ'S INDEPENDENCE

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

DOHA, March 5 (Bernama) -- The Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) formally opened an extraordinary meeting here today to discuss the threat of war on Iraq with its chairman Qatar reaffirming the need to maintain Iraq's independence.

Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani also stressed the need to maintain Iraq's unity, territorial integrity and non-interference in its internal affairs.

Making the remarks when opening the one-day meeting, he welcomed Iraq's acceptance of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441 and its cooperation in implementing the resolution aimed at disarming Baghdad of any weapons of mass destruction.

"We hope such cooperation continues as it is an important step towards the solution of this problem peacefully," said Sheikh Hamad, whose country is a key United States ally in the Persian Gulf.

Qatari's neighbour United Arab Emirates (UAE) has proposed that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein step down and go into exile to avoid a US-led attack on his country.

The proposal was made at an Arab League summit in the Egyptian Red Sea Resort of Sharm el-Sheikh and reiterated at the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Foreign Ministers meeting here on Monday.

Sheikh Hamad said that the choice in respect of Iraq was not between siding with a peaceful political solution or confronting the repercussions of the developments of events.

"It is based on what we can do so that Iraq can get out of this crisis in such a way that spare it and spare us a costly price and irremediable grave damage," he said.

Seen as a last-ditch effort to help avert a possible war against Iraq, the focus of the meeting was to show solidarity by the Muslim countries to resolve the Iraqi crisis amicably.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is among key OIC leaders attending the summit. Others include Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Turkish Prime Minister Abdullah Gul and Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei.

Iraq is represented by its vice-president, Izzat Ibrahim, and Foreign Minister Najib Sabri.

Malaysia will assume the leadership of the 57-member organisation when it hosts the OIC Summit in October.

-- BERNAMA

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