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NAM-Wrapup

SUMMIT CONTINUES TO RESONATE WITH ANTI-WAR CRY

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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 25 (Bernama) -- Concerns over a looming war in Iraq continued to dominate the final day of the 13th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit here today with the United States facing the wrath of member countries.

Many of the leaders said they believed a diplomatic and peaceful solution was still possible, even as the US indicated it stood ready to invade Baghdad.

Even if war was necessary, the leaders said, it should be authorised by the United Nations first.

Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe slammed the US for not destroying its own weapons of mass destruction, pointing out that Washington had refused to sign the treaty on nuclear disarmament.

"The United States, awakened to the implications of being the sole superpower, joined by Britain, as a born-again colonialist, and other Western countries have turned themselves into ferocious hunting bull-dogs raring to go, as they sniff for more blood, Third World blood.

"We, their hunted game, are for slaughter," he said.

Iraqi Vice-President Taha Yassin Ramadan issued an invitation to NAM to send a high-ranking delegation to his country to look into Baghdad's cooperation with the UN weapons inspectors.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said it was up to the NAM troika whether to make the trip.

"If you ask for my own view, I think the troika should go to Iraq," he added.

A statement on Iraq will be endorsed by the leaders at the close of the summit tonight.

North Korea, locked in a standoff with the US over its resumed nuclear programme, also took a swipe at Washington.

Its Vice-President, Kim Yong Nam, said the world had come to a stage where the sovereignty and right of existence of the developing countries had been gravely threatened.

He said his country was compelled to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty "to cope with the grave situation in which its supreme interests are extremely threatened by the reckless U.S policy to stifle the DPRK."

Also sharing the limelight today was Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, who spoke to delegates through a televised message.

Arafat asked NAM to send a fact-finding mission to Palestine to witness the atrocities of Israeli aggression against his people.

"I present before you the plight of our people, who have paid with their lives the price for their freedom and independence and who face a great obstacle in the form of Israeli settler colonialism," he said.

Member countries continued stressing the need to preserve the multilateral process and their faith in the UN, saying that it was the only way to move forward.

"NAM should reject unbridled unilateralism," Mauritius Prime Minister Sir Anerood Jugnauth told the gathering of kings, presidents and prime ministers.

The conference also resonated with calls to revitalise the movement in line with the theme of the summit, through greater economic capacity building and linkages among South-South countries and also with the North.

High expectations were also placed on Malaysia, which will lead the 116-member movement for the next three years.

Lakhdar Brahim, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's representative at the summit, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad would be able to provide the needed guidance for the grouping, describing him as a leader of calibre who is very highly respected in the Third World.

He was also sure that Dr Mahathir's deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, would continue to provide strong leadership for the grouping of developing countries after Dr Mahathir steps down this October.

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