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Dr M disappointed with Qatar's reluctance to convene OIC meeting

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PUTRAJAYA, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed disappointment over Qatar's reluctance in calling for an emergency session of the Organisation of Islamic Conference to discuss the threat of war in Iraq.

This has prompted Malaysia to organise a meeting of OIC members on the sidelines of next week's 13th Non-Aligned Movement Summit in Kuala Lumpur.

"We are disappointed because so many heads of governments of OIC countries who are also members of NAM will be here and it is a good opportunity for us to meet and discuss informally so that we can have a common stand.

"Even (Iranian President) Mohammed Khatami suggested to me on the phone that we should have a special session of the OIC after the NAM summit.

"Foreign Minister (Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar) had in fact contacted Qatar before this but they were not agreeable to having such a meeting here," Dr Mahathir said.

He was asked to comment on Qatar's failure to convene an emergency meeting of the OIC to discuss the threat of war in Iraq and other pressing issues which affected Muslims worldwide.

"We will, however, try to convene a meeting of OIC members in Kuala Lumpur, either formally or informally," Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister was speaking to reporters after a 90-minute discussion with a group of Palestinians who visited him at Seri Perdana.

The group, which comprised a few students from the Gaza Strip, had earlier related to Dr Mahathir their sufferings as a result of Israeli atrocities.

Dr Mahathir said there was no clear cut report that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction.

"All they (the weapons inspectors) are saying is that Iraq is not co-operating.

"How the Iraqis must co-operate, I don't know.

"Apparently, they have shown everything they have," he said.

Dr Mahathir said if the weapons inspectors or any other party knew that there were weapons and where they were being stored, they should logically go directly to the place.

In Shah Alam, Syed Hamid said Malaysia planned to initiate an emergency meeting of the OIC after the NAM Summit to discuss the Iraqi situation.

Malaysia is the incoming chairman of the OIC by virtue of the country hosting the organisation's summit in October.

He said it was hoped the one-day meeting, to take place after the NAM Summit on Feb 25, could be convened.

"Many OIC countries have voiced the need for an emergency meeting in view of the crisis affecting the world and Malaysia has decided to take the initiative," he told reporters after delivering a talk on "NAM - Issues and Its Future" at University College of Technology and Management Malaysia.

He said several OIC countries, which were not members of NAM, had indicated their interest in attending the emergency meeting.

Malaysia has written to Qatar, the current OIC chairman, about the emergency meeting, besides inviting the OIC secretary-general to NAM as an observer.

Syed Hamid said Qatar had voiced plans to hold an emergency summit in

Doha after the NAM Summit but since many OIC members would be in Kuala Lumpur next week, Malaysia decided to have it here.

"Why must we wait ... the war will not wait," said Syed Hamid.

He said details of the meeting had yet to be finalised as the matter needed further discussion with Dr Mahathir.

On the question of Palestine and Israel, he said: "Nobody is addressing this issue as though the lives of the Palestinians are not important."

Reiterating Malaysia's stand on anti-terrorism and world peace, he said: "We believe in the sharing of wealth and prosperity rather than sharing of guns and weapons. We know of so many countries that have weapons of mass destructions, including nuclear weapons."

"They say Iraq has such weapons, including chemical weapons. We know Israel has weapons of destruction. North Korea has nuclear weapons and so do some other nations."

After the dialogue, Syed Hamid received on behalf of the People's Alliance for Peace 12,000 signatures from KUTPM students forwarded in Malaysia's campaign for world peace.