

19/02/2003

OIC endorses KL's bid to host informal meeting after NAM

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PUTRAJAYA, Tues. - The Organisation of the Islamic Conference has endorsed Kuala Lumpur's initiative to host an informal OIC meeting immediately after the Non-Aligned Movement Summit here next week.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said current OIC chair Qatar had agreed to support the informal meeting of OIC members who would be in Kuala Lumpur for the NAM Summit.

"The Emir of Qatar (Sheikh Hamad Khalifa al-Thani) conveyed this to Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) during their telephone conversation yesterday, and the Foreign Minister of Qatar also rang me up to voice their support.

"They are also seeking our support to hold an emergency OIC session in Doha at a date which is yet to be determined... we have no problems with that," Syed Hamid said in Wisma Putra today.

He also expressed relief that Qatar, which had initially been lukewarm to suggestions for an informal OIC meeting in Kuala Lumpur, also considered the threat of war against Iraq and other pressing current issues as matters requiring the urgent attention of OIC members.

"This has been our contention, and the aspiration of a few other OIC members, that war is not a solution to conflicts. This will be the underlying message, be it in NAM or the OIC."

Syed Hamid was speaking at a Press conference after receiving 5,000 copies of Malaysia's New Economic Policy (NEP): An Overview from the book's editors Mukhriz Mahathir and Khairy Jamaluddin.

He also received 200 copies of Portrait of a Nation: A Poetic Anthology of a Beloved Leader from Saron Corporation Sdn Bhd executive chairman Datuk Sri Ram Sarma, and a RM1 million fuel sponsorship pledge from Petronas president and chief executive Tan Sri Mohd Hassan Marican.

The books will be distributed to delegates attending the NAM Summit, while the fuel sponsorship is for the more than 1,000 official vehicles to be used during the summit.

Malaysia floated the idea of an urgent OIC meeting in the wake of the "war threat" against Iraq and the continuous sufferings of the Palestinians, but the response from fellow OIC members had not been encouraging.

Even Iranian President Mohammad Khatami had personally called Dr Mahathir to voice his support for such a meeting in Kuala Lumpur in conjunction with the NAM Summit, but Qatar, then as the OIC chair, remained silent.

Expressing his disappointment over Qatar's reluctance, Dr Mahathir had said on Saturday that Malaysia would still try to realise a meeting between OIC members who will be in Kuala Lumpur.

"Either formal or informal, we will still try to have this meeting," Dr Mahathir said at his official residence on Saturday, after a dialogue with a group of Palestinians.

It was learnt that yesterday Dr Mahathir had telephoned the Emir of Qatar, resulting in the agreement for the OIC meet in Kuala Lumpur.

Syed Hamid said today that while Malaysia agreed to Qatar's suggestion for an emergency OIC summit in Doha, Kuala Lumpur was also firm in its stand that an urgent OIC meeting was necessary to arrive at a common position on the war against Iraq and the issue of Palestine.

"We must be united or try to share a common view if we want to be

heard," he said.