

PM: Put an end to violence in Iraq

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — Malaysia today called for an end to violence in Iraq, and for ethnic and sectarian leaders to engage in peaceful talks, aimed at national reconciliation.

In making the call, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said: "I am extremely and gravely concerned with the latest developments in Iraq because the increasing scale of violence is dangerously escalating into a situation which could become beyond control."

"On behalf of the Government and people of Malaysia, I would like to appeal to the people of Iraq, particularly the ethnic and sectarian leaders, to do everything possible and constructive to put an end to all violence, engage in peaceful discussions and earnestly establish a

process of national reconciliation.

"In my capacity as chairman of the Summit Conference of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), and on behalf of the member countries of the organisation, I would like to extend this same appeal to the Iraqi Transitional Government," he said in a statement.

Abdullah said it was not impossible for the people of Iraq to achieve a genuine and workable national accord.

The bombing of a Shia mosque in Samarra last Wednesday had unleashed a wave of Shia reprisals against Iraq's Sunni minority, with over 400 killed, pitching Iraq towards a civil war.

Yesterday, a series of bombings killed 64 people, including 25 in a car bomb outside a Baghdad Shia mosque, raising fears of fresh vio-

lence in the country.

"I hope the people of Iraq would consider it beneficial to establish a government of national unity.

"I have no doubt that the power to do so lies in the hands of the people of Iraq.

"I pray that the people of Iraq will not look upon compromises in negotiations only as a last resort but apply that approach as the first preference in their deliberations," Abdullah said.

The Prime Minister said he had great faith that the vast majority of Iraqis do not wish their country to be divided and their people fragmented along ethnic and sectarian lines.

"The people of Malaysia fully support these sentiments. Living in a multi-racial and multi-religious society, Malaysians understand the

imperative for mutual respect between racial groups and harmonious coexistence between religions," he said.

Abdullah said Malaysians have no other wish but to see the early dawning of peace, stability and prosperity for the people of Iraq.

The Prime Minister added that Malaysia would like to engage Iraq in cordial and co-operative relations for mutual benefit and it stands ready to assist in whatever way deemed appropriate by the leaders of Iraq.

Abdullah said the international community too has an urgent responsibility to help preserve the territorial integrity of Iraq for the sake of the people of Iraq. — Bernama