

# Mahathir: Violence won't solve anything

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By OUR REPORTER

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has expressed his sadness over the death of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, adding that violence will not solve political problems but only add to them.

The Prime Minister, who spoke to reporters in Kuching after chairing the

## **MORE REPORTS: p4**

weekly Cabinet meeting, said problems faced by a country should be solved peacefully and not through confrontation.

"There is no point in winning an election if violence persists, because then even the winner would not be able to administer the country effectively.

"I am sad that this has to happen. We are fond of saying that the democratic system works. But democracy will not work if the people do not really understand its principles," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said in an election it is not important who wins or loses. "What's important is that no one should resort to violence. What all parties should do is to promote the belief and the good things each party can do," he added.

A Wisma Putra spokesman said that the Prime Minister had sent a condolence message to Indian Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar.

"The death of yet another world leader at the hands of violence and brutality is an outrage that justly deserves the strongest condemnation," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said in the message. He said that the late Mr Gandhi will be remembered as a great leader and an illustrious son of India.

"Malaysia will always remember Mr Gandhi for his outstanding contribution to the Commonwealth, the Non-Aligned

Cont'd Page 4, Col 3

# Violence doesn't solve anything, says Dr M

FROM PAGE ONE

BT 23 MAY 1991

Movement and world peace," he added.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said elections should be a peaceful democratic process. "It should be achieved through the ballot. All Malaysians should be thankful that the Government has maintained a peaceful democratic system in the country," he said.

Energy, Telecommunications and Post Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said he is glad that in Malaysia, "we can practise democracy successfully".

*Reuter adds from New Delhi:* At least eight people died and scores were injured in protests across India yesterday in a surge of anger against the killing of Mr Gandhi in a bomb attack.

Chanting crowds set fire to buses, cars and shops in several towns, and businesses closed in protest against Tuesday's assassination.

Indian news agencies said police opened fire to quell violent protests in three southern Indian states and the western city of Bombay.

Among the dead in the clashes were two children apparently hit by police bullets.

Police imposed curfews in several towns in the northern state of Haryana and the badly-hit southern state of Andhra Pradesh, state officials said.

The Government has put security forces on full alert following the killing. Tension was already high because of the fiercely-con-

tested elections in which 200 people had died since the start of campaigning six weeks ago.

After the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi in 1984 by her Sikh bodyguards, around 3,000 people died in a backlash against Sikhs across India.

Meanwhile, India's Congress party elected Sonia Gandhi as party president to succeed her assassinated husband.

"The decision of the Congress Working Committee will now be communicated to her," a senior Congress source said. The committee is the party's highest decision-making body.

The 42-year-old Italian-born widow had the support of younger members of the Congress inner-circle.

Party spokesman Pranab Mukherjee refused to clarify whether Mrs Gandhi would be the party's choice for prime minister if it won the election.

A five-member delegation led by former foreign minister Narasimha Rao will meet President Ramaswamy Venkataraman "to appraise him of the situation arising out of the assassination."

Mr Rao had been tipped to win the party leadership himself.

The first claim of responsibility for the assassination was made yesterday but police did not seem to take it seriously.

Reporters at the Times of India newspaper bureau in the southern city of Bangalore said a telephone caller made the claim on behalf of a previously unknown group.

Police said they had never heard of it and would say only they had taken note of the claim when the Times passed it on.

Times reporters said the man identified himself as "Commander of the Combined Forces". He said his group killed Mr Gandhi as part of "Operation Final Vengeance".

Before abruptly hanging up, the caller said the assassination was carried out on behalf of what he called minorities in India and Sri Lanka fighting for independence.

Times reporters said it appeared to be a crank call.

None of the major groups fighting separatist wars in India and Sri Lanka have claimed responsibility for the assassination.