

# PM: We may help defend Bosnians

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia is prepared to join an Islamic military force to help Bosnia-Herzegovina if Muslim countries agreed to send troops under such an arrangement.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday Malaysia was willing to consider providing arms to the Bosnians if it would help them to defend themselves.

"If the Islamic countries agree (to send forces), we will have to go along with them," he said after opening the MCA annual general assembly.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on an Iranian proposal for Islamic countries to provide military assistance to Bosnian Muslims under attack by Serbs in the former Yugoslav state.

Iran has proposed that the foreign and defence ministers

of all member countries of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) meet to discuss the matter.

Dr Mahathir, however, stressed that Malaysia usually sent its troops to other nations as part of the United Nations peacekeeping force.

He expressed disappointment with the UN Security Council which had approved the use of military force, as a last resort, to ensure the relief aid for Bosnia Herzegovina.

"By that time, perhaps many Bosnians would have been killed. Maybe, in the end, there will be no more Muslims in Bosnia," he said.

Asked to comment on a statement by Semangat 46 president Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah that Malaysia's decision to sever ties with Yugoslavia was a mistake, Dr Mahathir replied:

"I think Tengku Razaleigh does not know about foreign affairs.

"Actually, we do not have anything in Bosnia-Herzegovina which is an independent state.

"The same goes for Slovenia and Croatia. It is with Serbia with which we have broken off ties."

At the United Nations, members of the Islamic group are exploring the possibility of calling for an emergency special session of the General Assembly to debate the crisis at Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Ambassador Mustafa Aksin of Turkey said he led a delegation from the Islamic group to discuss the matter with Assembly president Samir Shihabi.

The full 47-member group would hold a closed-door meeting tomorrow, Aksin said.