

# Dr M: We stay firm in commitment to Bosnia

NSF 14 MAY 1994

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia was committed towards carrying on its task in helping the Bosnians even though another Malaysian soldier has been killed.

"We cannot feel disappointed because we have committed ourselves to assisting Bosnia," he told the official media during a Press Conference on arrival at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport after a trip which had taken him to Zimbabwe, South Africa, France, the United States and China.

*Bernama* reports that Dr Mahathir extended his condolences to the family of Mejar Ariffin Zakaria and expressed sadness over his death.

The Prime Minister also hoped that the family would be able to bear the grief with patience.

Mej Ariffin, 33, was killed in a mortar fire at Ilijas about 25km from Visoko. His body is now at the Malaysian Battalion base in Visoko, waiting to be brought to Zagreb in Croatia before being flown to Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia's role in Bosnia-Herzegovina might be small but it was effective and no one could argue when Malaysia voiced its feelings about the situation in Bosnia.

On the failure of the United Nations to handle the problem in the former Yugoslav republic, he said it was evident that the world body obstructed any action to be taken against the Serbs, and that Malaysia had expressed dissatisfaction with the situation.

"It seems like there is an attempt to force the Muslims in Bosnia to accept whatever decision the UN adopts," he said.

"When we question Nato (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation), it refers us to the UN... when we ask the UN, it says Nato has to make the decision.

"The decisions of the UN favour the assumption that the Serbs have control over Bosnian territory, and this

is what saddens me," he said.

On statements by several countries in support of Malaysia's call for the resignation of UN secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Dr Mahathir said the UN representative in Bosnia, Yasushi Akashi, should also be removed. He felt that Akashi seemed to be obstructing any action to be taken against the Serbs.

Dr Mahathir also said that western countries were now beginning to criticise Boutros-Ghali and Akashi.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and several Cabinet Ministers were at the airport to receive Dr Mahathir.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak told a Press Conference at his office that Ariffin, together with an Egyptian military observer, accompanied by a

local Bosnian liaison officer, had gone on patrol on Wednesday in Ilijas, about 25km from Visoko, which lies northwest of Sarajevo.

Their mission was to report on shelling incidents by Serbs on Bosnian areas, at the edge of the UN and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation heavy weapons exclusion zone, and to investigate a report on a "missing" Serbian tank.

"While on patrol, their vehicle broke down and they were forced to spend the night at an observation post about 400 metres away from the vehicle," he said.

"Yesterday, they tried to repair the vehicle with the help of a member of the Bosnian Muslim militia who had voluntarily come to their aid.

"Suddenly there was mortar fire and several shells landed about five metres

from them. Ariffin was seriously wounded in his left thigh and back and suffered severe loss of blood," he said.

He died at 7.45pm (Malaysian time), about 15-minutes after the shelling occurred, 18 days short of completing his 14th year in the service.

He added that the Egyptian soldier also suffered serious injuries to his legs while the Bosnian Muslim was struck by shrapnels in his back.

The wounded were later evacuated to the Canadian Battalion headquarters at Visoko where they are undergoing treatment.

"If we talk about the situation in Bosnia, it is not only the peacekeepers or the observers who are at risk, but it is also the civilians.

"More than 200,000 Bosnians have been killed since the conflict started. How

many more does it take to die before the UN can take stern action?" he asked.

Ariffin was seconded as a military observer with the UN Protection Force (Unprofor) on Sept 20 last year. Born on Jan 20, 1961 in Temerloh, Pahang he joined the army on July 7, 1979 as a regular cadet officer and was commissioned into the elite Special Forces Regiment on May 30, 1980.

His last position before leaving for the UN mission was as the Uniform Squadron leader with the 11th Special Forces Regiment.

On April 19, another military observer, Mej Ramli Shaari died in Croatia in a land mine explosion.

Kpl Mat Aznan Awang, a peacekeeper with the UN Operation in Somalia II, was killed in a battle with Somali rebels in Mogadishu on Oct 4 last year.