

17 SEP 1996

PM-Arafat

ARAFAT THANKS MAHATHIR FOR MALAYSIA'S SUPPORT

By: K.C. Leong

HARARE, Sept 17 (Bernama) -- Palestinian President Yasser Arafat has expressed his heartfelt thanks to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for Malaysia's unflagging support for the Palestinian cause.

He conveyed this message during a brief meeting between the two leaders at the Harare International Conference Centre yesterday evening on the sidelines of the World Solar Summit which both are attending here.

The prime minister earlier told Malaysian newsmen he was meeting the Palestinian leader to find out the latest developments on Palestine and what support Malaysia could extend to the Palestinian people in their struggles.

Arafat said he took the opportunity to brief Dr Mahathir in detail on the latest developments in Palestine, especially after the installation of the new Israeli government.

He added that he considered Dr Mahathir and the Malaysian people to be among the staunchest supporters of the Palestinians when they were suffering under the most difficult circumstances.

"We cannot forget (Malaysia's support). We have to remember in our hearts forever," said the Palestinian President, who was in his familiar attire of military jacket and headdress.

"We have to thank you from our hearts for what you have done in the past and what you are doing now. We can never forget," he told the Malaysian newsmen.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir said he was saddened by the latest developments in the Gulf where the United States has been steadily building up its military forces in confrontation with Iraq.

Responding to questions, he said that it was very clear that allies of the United States in the anti-Baghdad coalition and the Gulf nations did not agree with Washington's actions.

American moves in recent weeks have included cruise missile attacks on Iraqi targets, deployment of an extra aircraft carrier and F-17 stealth fighter bombers, a build-up of military personnel as well as reports of a failed US\$100 million covert operation to oust President Saddam Hussein.

Dr Mahathir said Iraq had said it would stop targetting U.S. and allied aircraft flying in so-called "no fly zones" which the Americans had unilaterally extended without the agreement of the United Nations.

Malaysia was worried about such unilateral action, he said, stressing that Malaysia was condemning the U.S. not because it was an enemy of the U.S. but because "we will condemn whoever is wrong".

He added that Malaysia was also saddened because such action was being taken by a power which Malaysia regarded as a friend and which was the champion of freedom and democracy. -- BERNAMA

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