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Mahathir-Palestine

M'SIA PREPARED TO COOPERATE IN RECONSTRUCTION OF PALESTINE

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 17 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Malaysia has initiated efforts to help in the reconstruction of Palestine, and is prepared to cooperate with any parties in this endeavour.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia had contributed US\$5 million to a fund for the reconstruction.

"We are prepared to cooperate with any parties to redevelop Palestine," he told reporters after simultaneously launching the "MASSA" weekly magazine published by the Utusan Group and its Utusan Malaysia Online service at a hotel here.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on a proposal made by Philippine President Fidel Ramos during a "live" dialogue via the Internet, held in conjunction with the launch.

Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat was to have been hooked up for a three-way dialogue but he could not participate because of line problems. He contacted Dr Mahathir using a cellular telephone.

Ramos had said that "for the mutual benefit of Malaysia, Palestine and the Philippines, we in Asean should seriously consider assisting in the development of Palestine in the area of foreign investment programme by committing ourselves".

In the dialogue, where Ramos' written reply was read out by programme moderator Mahadzir Lokman, the Philippine President said: "I hope that we from Asean can do something to help in the peace process in the development of Palestine. We certainly can do something in the development of Palestine."

On his conversation with Arafat, Dr Mahathir said it only touched on the problem of the Internet line which failed to be linked up with Jericho.

The Prime Minister said he apologised for the hitch on behalf of the organisers.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir received a Golkar delegation led by Indonesian Information Minister Harmoko at the same venue. The Indonesian visitors also attended the launch.

Dr Mahathir said Golkar and Umno as well as Indonesian and Malaysian entrepreneurs could work together to overcome common problems.

Among the topics discussed was ways to increase food production in the republic, which has a large population, Dr Mahathir said.

"We can cooperate to produce more foodstuff, for example in Indonesia, so that it does not have to buy from other countries. Now Indonesia has to import rice and other things," he said.

Replying to a question from an Indonesian journalist, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia hoped to increase trade with Indonesia.

"For example, if Indonesia is already rich and can afford to buy Malaysia-made goods, we can export to Indonesia," he said. He said this cooperation would be implemented as soon as possible.

In his speech at the launching, Dr Mahathir said Malaysians overseas no longer need to depend on the foreign media to learn about developments in the country because the Malaysian media had their own pages on Internet.

He congratulated the Utusan Group for introducing the service and hoped that the people would use Internet wisely. -- Bernama