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Mahathir-East Timor

ASEAN COUNTRIES SHOULD HELP RESOLVE EAST TIMOR PROBLEM, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 14 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Malaysia feels that the Asean countries should be the ones to send forces to help resolve the problem in East Timor.

"But it is clear that other countries, especially Australia, are keen to send their troops to East Timor. It's their habit, they are happy for a chance to pressure their neighbour, to run down the neighbour, that's their way," he said.

He said this when asked to comment on Asean's role to help overcome the East Timor conflict at a news conference after addressing a mammoth gathering in Taman Keramat, near here.

Thousands of East Timorese were reported killed and tens of thousands made homeless in the rampage by pro-Jakarta militias following the Aug 30 UN-supervised referendum in which the majority of East Timorese voted for independence from Indonesia.

Indonesian President B.J. Habibie announced on Sunday that the republic agreed to allow the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces in East Timor to end the conflict in the former Portuguese colony.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had no problem sending its troops to East Timor and had given Habibie an undertaking to do so if Habibie wanted them.

Yesterday, he said Malaysia had said yes to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan when asked whether it was prepared to contribute forces.

The prime minister hoped that other Asean countries would also help to resolve the conflict in East Timor.

He also said that Indonesia was still responsible for East Timor because the region had been under its rule for about 25 years.

-- BERNAMA

AFY JK