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Dr M on why Malaysia was meeting cost of peacekeepers

KANGAR, Tues. - Malaysia will bear the cost of its army contingent which left yesterday to join the International Force in East Timor (Interfet).

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said: "Today, it is not yet a (United Nations) peacekeeping force.

"It is the initiative of several countries and they were allowed (to be there) by the UN but they have to bear the costs themselves."

He said Malaysia would send troops to be part of the UN peacekeeping force once the world body finalised its decision to get involved directly in the troubled province.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters at the end of his two-day working visit to Perlis at the Bukit Ayer recreational centre, near here, today.

He said the United Nations was not lending any assistance nor financing the present peacekeeping force in East Timor and countries which had troops there had to bear their own costs.

Dr Mahathir also expressed hope that there would not be any war between the peacekeepers and the Indonesian factions who opposed the independence of the island as it would not benefit anyone.

"Indonesians themselves have agreed to the referendum and therefore (they) should abide by it. I don't think war will settle anything. I have never believed in waging war as a way to solve a problem."

To date, 76 Malaysian policemen and soldiers have been deployed under the Interfet and UN Assessment Mission in East Timor (Unamet).

The latest batch of 30 Malaysian soldiers who left for the island yesterday made up part of the second phase of the peacekeeping force being deployed there.

They are part of the Malaysian Team (Maltim) under the command of Brig-Jen Datuk Mohamad Khalid Saad.

Earlier, 46 soldiers were sent under the first phase of the mission to help supervise East Timor's referendum as military liaison observers for between six and 12 months.

Defence Minister Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Abang Mustapha said yesterday the United Nations would only reimburse the cost of the third phase of the peacekeeping mission.

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