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PM: Malaysia willing to send troops to East Timor

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MALAYSIA is prepared and willing to send troops to East Timor under the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

Speaking to newsmen after opening a four-day 12th Commonwealth Law Conference in Petaling Jaya yesterday, Dr Mahathir said UN secretary-general Kofi Annan had asked him whether Malaysia could contribute forces if needed.

"I told him (Annan), Malaysia said yes. We are quite willing to serve in East Timor and if it is fine with everybody, we will send our troops there," he said.

Dr Mahathir was asked whether Malaysia would send its troops to East Timor as Indonesia has agreed to allow an international peacekeeping force there.

Thousands of East Timorese are feared to have been killed and tens of thousands made homeless in the rampage by pro-Jakarta militias, following the August 30 UN-supervised referendum, in which the majority of East Timorese voted for independence.

Indonesia President B.J. Habibie, in a nationally televised speech after meeting with top officials, including armed forces chief General Wiranto on Sunday, agreed that the suffering in East Timor had to stop immediately.

As such, Indonesia had to bow to overwhelming international pressure to agreed to let foreign peacekeeping troops into bloodied East Timor. Indonesia had repeatedly balked at international pressure to let outside troops into the territory.

Following the decision taken last Sunday, it will be the first time armed foreign troops have been allowed into Indonesia since it won independence from the Dutch more than 50 years ago.

Habibie's announcement followed meetings with his Cabinet, military chiefs and a UN Security Council team that toured the ruined capital of East Timor, Dili.

On Malaysia's call for reforms in the UN, especially those concerning the veto powers by five permanent members of the UN Security Council, Dr Mahathir said it will serve no purpose as such proposals will only be falling on deaf ears.

In a country where the Government is feudal, Dr Mahathir said reform becomes difficult as the constitution would require consent of the feudal ruler.

"And, currently the feudal rulers is not going to give consent. So, there is nothing much we can do. We are small countries, we have to grim and bear it," he said.

Earlier in his speech, Dr Mahathir said the structure and the role of the UN have not been subjected to any updating in keeping with the times. "It is ridiculous that this important world body is still tethered to the results of the World War fought 50 years ago. The victory of certain nations in that war seems to entitle them to hegemony over the UN and the world forever.

"The Permanent Five will not yield to anyone nor forego their veto rights. Anyone of them can frustrate the rest of the 170 odd members of the UN," he said.

Dr Mahathir said while the undemocratic power may well sit with China

and Russia, the other three countries - the US, Britain and France - preach democracy ad nauseam.

"Thus, it does not become them to be blatantly feudal and undemocratic in the UN when they so vehemently insist that every country must be democratic," he said.

Dr Mahathir noted that the Permanent Five controls the affairs of the UN and prevents any dissenting voice from being heard.

"At times, they even ignore international laws and practices. Thus, they would think nothing of arresting the leader of a country and trying him under the laws of their own country," he said.

Despite being members of the UN, Dr Mahathir said small countries seek no redress against the oppressive measure taken against them.

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