

Dr Mahathir: New links with Syria needed

Net 13 JUN 2000

TOKYO, Mon. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad expressed sadness on the death of Syrian President Hafez Assad, saying that Assad was involved in efforts to end the War between its neighbours.

Dr Mahathir, currently on a visit to Japan, said new links will have to be developed following the death of Assad thereby delaying the peace process.

An Arab-Israeli cliché has held that there could be no peace without Is-

rael and that, according to some observers, has meant there could be no peace without Assad.

Assad, who ruled Syria for 30 years, died of a heart attack on Saturday in Damascus.

He will be succeeded by his son, Bashar al-Assad, a 34-year-old eye doctor who was yesterday named as commander-in-chief of the Syrian armed forces. Bashar was nominated to take over as Syrian president by the Baath Party.

Dr Mahathir also said he would stress on unity among the Group of 15 (G-15) developing countries at their meeting in Cairo next week and on the need for them to act together.

He admitted that this was not easy because different members of the grouping had different policies.

In **Kuala Lumpur**, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar told Bernama the death of Assad would not affect the ongoing West Asian peace process as the leaders in the

region wanted lasting peace.

He said Malaysia was confident that Assad's successor would not only safeguard his country's interests but also ensure the success of peace,

In paying tribute to Assad, Syed Hamid said the late president was a key figure in West Asia and played a crucial role in the Middle East peace process.

His death was a big loss to Syria, the people and the region, Syed Hamid added.