

11 JUNE 2000

Chechnya-Mahathir

MASKHADOV SEEKS DR MAHATHIR'S HELP TO END CHECHNYA CONFLICT

By: Haikal Mohd Isa

KUALA LUMPUR, June 11 (Bernama) -- Chechen president Aslan Maskhadov wants Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to mediate in getting Russia and Chechnya to start negotiations to end the conflict in Chechnya.

"I would be very grateful to the Malaysian Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, if he could bring Chechnya and Russia to start the negotiation process," he said.

Maskhadov said this in an exclusive interview with Bernama from his mountain hideout in Chechnya.

Maskhadov said he had tried to contact Dr Mahathir but the effort was in vain due to the poor conditions endured in the battlefields, with no telephone or fax machine.

"I hope through this message the Prime Minister could reply," he said.

He also hoped to see Malaysia and Chechnya establish good bilateral relations but he said he was aware Russia could be a problem in realising this objective.

"I am sure when we have established civilised relations with Russia, we can then have good relationships with Malaysia," he said.

Maskhadov, who have been to Malaysia several years ago, described Malaysia as a "wonderful country with a wonderful people".

He said in order to solve the conflict in Chechnya, which has taken a heavy toll on lives, the war must be stopped immediately in order to kick start the negotiation process.

Maskhadov cautioned Russia not to take his offer for a negotiation as a sign of weakness, stressing that "we are not weak, just that this is the right decision".

The negotiation process he said, should only involved Chechens and Russians.

"There is no reason to look for a third party," he said.

"There is a parliament and leadership in Chechnya who the Russians can conduct peaceful negotiations with."

Maskhadov wants Russia to respect and comply with the decisions adopted by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe in its summit in Istanbul, Turkey.

The OSCE and Council of Europe want the warring sides to stop fighting and to start peace negotiations.

"Unfortunately, Russia has ignored the decisions made by the OSCE, the Council of Europe and even the United Nations (UN)," he said.

Maskhadov said he would announce soon a new offer to bring an end to the carnage.

Commenting on the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) meeting in Kuala Lumpur later this month, Maskhadov said he has great hopes of the meeting.

"We think that our Muslim brothers understand what is happening to us now. We hope the OIC meeting will help further our cause and recognise the right of Chechnya to be independent," he said.

He hopes the meeting "will condemn the Russian aggression against the Chechen people".

Maskhadov estimated 20,000 Chechens had perished as a result of the conflict between Chechnya and Russia.

-- BERNAMA

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