

25 AUG 2001

Mahathir-Arafat

DR M CONCERNED OVER PALESTINIANS' SUFFERINGS

PUTRAJAYA, Aug 25 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed Malaysia's profound concern over the prolonged sufferings of innocent Palestinians which were caused by Israeli aggression.

"We are concerned over the millions of Palestinians who are cut off from the rest of the world. Their food supplies are cut off by the Israelis," he told reporters after an hour-long meeting with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat at his official residence "Seri Perdana" here.

Arafat, who led a seven-member Palestinian delegation, made a brief stop-over in Malaysia to explain to Dr Mahathir the latest developments in West Asia.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia sympathised with the plight of Palestinians who were short of medical and food supplies due to constant checks by the Israeli military.

"Every Palestinian village is like a prison as the Israelis have placed their tanks and soldiers and check everyone who moves around, so much so that sick people and pregnant mothers are not able to go to hospital for treatment," he said.

"This is what worries us. They are unable to travel...before it took only hours to travel from one point to another and today it takes days," he said.

On the shortage of food supply, Dr Mahathir said: "We don't know whether we can help them with regard to food supply but it's always our policy to help."

Arafat is on a whirlwind tour of Asian countries to drum up international support for the Palestinian cause against Israeli occupation and to end the bloodshed in that region.

-- BERNAMA

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