

# Israel must withdraw troops, insists Dr M

STAR 17 APR 2002

RABAT: Negotiations are impossible with "guns pointing at our heads" and the only way to end the current Middle East conflict is by Israel making a total withdrawal from Palestine, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

Asked on Malaysia's stand by a Moroccan journalist at a joint press conference by the Prime Minister and his Moroccan counterpart, Abdurrahmane Yousouffi, after a bilateral meeting yesterday, he said: "You cannot negotiate with guns pointing at one's head. Israel must withdraw and go back to its own territory."

He said it was vital for Islamic countries to unite and take a common stand especially in the wake of what was happening in Palestine, adding that Muslims were being oppressed in many parts of the world.

"We have tried to define terrorism. We have also got to look at the causes of terrorism as there must be a reason why people resort to

certain actions.

"The Palestinians are reacting in the way they do because of Israel's invasion and refusal to evacuate and go back to their own land.

"The other obvious cause is oppression of Muslims. There is no choice but for Muslim countries to take a unified stand on the issue," he added.

On the bilateral talks between the two countries, he said although political co-operation was good, links in other areas were lacking, especially in trade and economy.

He said the two-way trade was still small and needed an impetus to improve.

The Prime Minister described his trip as fruitful, with six agreements and memorandums of understanding signed on the first day of his visit.

He was confident that the ministers and corporate leaders who met their counterparts yesterday would follow up on their discussions and plan of actions to be implemented for mutual benefit.