

Anger mounting in Muslim world, says PM

11 STAR 23 APR 2002

SEPANG: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said anger is mounting in the Muslim world over the violence perpetrated by Israel over the people of Palestine.

The issue, said the Prime Minister, was brought up in his meetings with national leaders in Morocco, Libya and Bahrain during his official visits to the three countries.

"The Muslim world is very angry at Israel and disappointed with the United States for supporting Israel's inhumane treatment of the people of Palestine.

"It's clear that the US supports Israel although in Jenin (Palestine refugee camps in Jenin) hundreds have been killed clearly by the Israeli forces, including those who demolished the houses with the occupants still inside," he told reporters upon his arrival at the KL International Airport from a week-long visit to the three countries yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said what the Israel regime was doing to the Palestinians was "an extraordinary and inhumane act of terrorism."

And all that, he said, was perpetrated by a community that had previously appealed

for world sympathy because their people were killed by the German Nazis.

"Now there are people who call (Israeli Prime Minister Ariel) Sharon a man of peace.

"If Sharon is a man of peace, so are all those suicide bombers," he added.

Asked if Kuala Lumpur would try to explain the Muslim perspective on the conflict during his talks with US President George W. Bush, scheduled for next-month, Dr Mahathir said:

"We can try, but what kind of influence can we wield?"

The Jewish community in the US, he said, was not only very strong and united, but could influence the outcome of all democratic processes in the country; unlike the Muslim community that was weak.

"The Israel lobby in the US is very powerful, very united and as a result they can influence the outcome of a democratic election," he said, adding that this was also true among other Jews worldwide.

Giving an example, Dr Mahathir said when he made statements condemning currency trader George Soros and pointed out that he was a Jew, the whole Jewish community went against him.

"They are so well-networked that they can orchestrate any political action, whereas the 1.3 billion Muslims worldwide cannot work together," he added.

Asked to describe his just-concluded trip, Dr Mahathir said it was a success as it managed to ensure support for possible economic and trade linkages between Malaysia and the three countries.

"We have opened the doors, established the contact with the governments and we have ensured their support. So it is up to the private sector now to work hard," he said.

He said that throughout the visit, the question that was constantly asked was how Malaysia changed from being an agricultural economy to an industrialised one.

Dr Mahathir said Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi showed particular interest in learning about Malaysia's development approach.

On another issue, Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, said the appointment of the new party information chief to replace Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, who resigned recently, would be decided by the coming supreme council meeting.