

Dr M: Relevance of UN in question

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'Israel defying everyone with help of US'

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today questioned the relevance of the existence of the United Nations if a single nation like Israel could defy the whole world and the world body.

Expressing sadness and sorrow over the fate of Palestine and its people, Dr Mahathir said: "There is no use in us having the United Nations, what is the use of the UN?"

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on an announcement by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan that the world body had retracted its intention to send a fact-finding mission to the Jenin refugee camp due to Israel's protests.

Despite Arab opposition, Annan formally disbanded the team that would have probed Israel's military attack on the Jenin refugee camp.

On Wednesday, Jenin hospital officials said 52 bodies had been uncovered of which human rights

groups said 22 were civilians. Palestinian officials insist that many more may have died — and are possibly buried under a pile of rubble the size of two football fields.

To a question whether the UN should pursue legal action against Israel for continuing to defy the world body, Dr Mahathir said by right, action could be taken but such action cannot possibly be enforced as long as "the strongest nation behind the UN, stood alongside Israel".

"Indirectly, Israel has the power of the superpower nation," he said.

Asked if the release of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat was sufficient for peace in the region, Dr Mahathir said:

"Firstly, UN peacekeepers must be assigned to Palestine, secondly, the Palestinians must not be further discriminated or disturbed; all the settlements on their land must be demolished and Palestinians residing in Israel must be allowed a safe return to their homeland... this is our stand."

Asked whether he would bring

up the Palestinian issue during his meeting with US President George W. Bush later this month, he said: "Normally when we meet powerful leaders like the US President we'll have very limited time, but I'll try to convey what we can."

On his initiative to formulate a "peace plan" for the MCA, he said it should not be misconstrued as direct interference in the party's affairs and that he believed that the majority of those in MCA agreed with the plan although there were bound to be some who disagreed.

"If they want to level anything against me, let it be but what I did was for the benefit of the party. As a long standing ally of Umno we cannot just sit and watch while they face serious problems. If we can help we do so but if our assistance is not required it is all right with us," the Umno president said.

He said the plan was moving well and urged the media not to expect things to happen overnight. "Everything takes time, if there are no controversies there is nothing for you to report, right?"