

# PEACE MOVE

KL, Vatican:  
Third party  
needed to  
resolve  
M-E conflict

By TAN KAH PENG

**VATICAN CITY:** Malaysia and the Holy See have called for international intervention in the Middle East conflict through the involvement of a third party to separate the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, after a historic meeting with Pope John Paul II here, said: "We must try to put an end to this violence through negotiations."

The joint stand is significant as there is a growing consensus in the world for such third party involvement, a stand that is strongly opposed by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon while Washington is also not too keen on it.

Dr Mahathir told the press outside the Basilica after the meeting the Pope and talks with Vatican officials including secretary of state Cardinal Angelo Sodano and secretary for relations with states Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran yesterday that both sides shared similar views on terrorism and the Middle East issue.

The Malaysian delegation included Energy, Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Amar Leo Moggie, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Bernard Dompok (both Roman Catholics), National Fatwa Council chairman Datuk Dr Ismail

Ibrahim, independent religious preacher Uthman Muhamadi and Malaysian ambassador to Italy Datuk Shamsudin Abdullah.

Dr Mahathir said both sides discussed at length the issue of international terrorism and the need to remove the causes of terrorism.

Asked how Muslim countries can help combat terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda, he said apart from using military and security measures, the world needed to find out the causes of terrorism.

"We need to find out why they

are behaving this way.

"I believe it is related to what is happening in Palestine, the question of Palestinians losing their land through expulsion and occupation.

"It is not so much a religious war, (but) more a fight to regain their own territory. Because the majority of the Palestinians are Muslims, their struggle attracts a lot of sympathy from the Muslim world."

Dr Mahathir also said Muslims the world over felt they were being oppressed as a number of Islamic

countries had come under attack and sanctions imposed on them.

Asked whether the question of diplomatic ties were discussed, he said the Holy See did not request it but it hoped to see bilateral relations "heightened."

Pope John Paul II, who had invited Dr Mahathir to the Vatican, told his guest that he had once visited Malaysia.

The Prime Minister, who was pleasantly surprised by the news, told the press the visit was made

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## Pontiff happy with religious freedom, says Mahathir

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before John Paul became the pontiff.

Asked what they discussed during the four-eyed meeting, Dr Mahathir said the Pope enquired "a lot about Malaysia" and South-East Asia while he took the opportunity to call for an end to the violence in the Middle East.

He also told the Pope that Malaysians enjoyed religious freedom in the country, to which the pontiff replied that he was happy with the situation.

The pontiff told Dr Mahathir he hoped to meet Malaysian Catholics.

Asked whether he invited the Pope to visit Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said the 82-

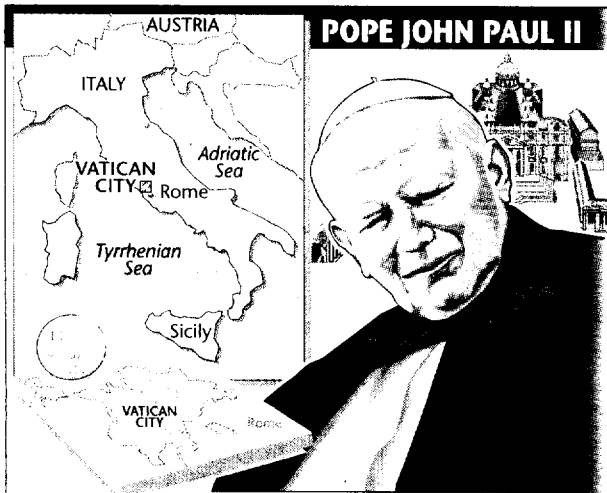
year-old Pontiff would not be able to accept any invitation, alluding to his frail health.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir introduced his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali to Pope John Paul, who also met Moggie and Dompok.

The Malaysian delegation later toured the Sistine Chapel.

Dr Mahathir left to perform Friday prayers at the Rome Mosque located within the Islamic Cultural Centre. He was met by Bangladeshi ambassador Mohammad Ziauddin, ICC secretary-general Dr Abdellah Redouane and the mosque's imam Mahmoud Hammad.

Dr Mahathir is on a one-week visit to Europe that will also take him to Switzerland and Luxembourg.



- His full name is **Karol Joseph Wojtyla** (pronounced *Voy-tee-wah*).  
Age: 82
- Head of the Roman Catholic Church which has one billion followers
- He was born in Wadowice, Poland, on May 18, 1920, to an administrative officer in the Polish army and a former schoolteacher. By 1942 he was studying for the priesthood and was ordained a priest on Nov 1, 1946.
- He became the Archbishop of Krakow on Dec 30, 1963. On Oct 16, 1978, at age 58, he was elected to succeed Pope John Paul I.
- He was the first Polish Pope and also the first non-Italian Pope since Pope Adrian VI in 1522.
- Pope John Paul II is the most travelled pope in the history of the Papacy, having visited nearly every country in the world which would receive him. It is his custom to kiss the earth of each land he visits as soon as he puts his feet to that country.
- The Vatican City is a fully independent state which includes ten other buildings in Rome and the Pope's residence at Castel Gandolfo. As the Holy See, it is the seat of the Catholic Church, deriving its income from investments and voluntary contributions known as Peter's Pence.