

# Arafat sends SOS to Mahathir

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**LONDON:** Holed up in his besieged compound, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat made a desperate call to his long-time friend Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for help.

Arafat called Mahathir from his compound in the West Bank on Friday, just before the latter flew here en route to the ASEM (Asean-Europe) meeting in Copenhagen.

The prime minister said during his stopover here on Saturday he would respond to this call for help by writing to Western leaders to seek their intervention in this "most terrible situation" where Israeli troops have already laid Arafat under siege with about 100 supporters in his half-destroyed administrative building.

He was speaking to Malaysian journalists soon after addressing a Muslim-led multi-faith community regeneration group, Faith Regen, at the Sulaimaniye Mosque, in one of the

most deprived inner city areas in East London on the theme "Multi-Faith Cohesion"

"Arafat told me he was under quasi house arrest. This is a most extraordinary situation although I know they are doing this to him because of the recent bomb explosion by suicide bombers. Even without Arafat, these operations will continue as they do not take their cue from him," Mahathir said.

"I fear that if Arafat is killed, he will be regarded as a martyr and as an oppressed person, and this will lead to more violence, more bombing attacks."

He repeated a call he had made to Western powers earlier at the luncheon meeting that they should look at the roots of "terrorism" and not just talk about increased "security" measures.

"There's too much concentration on security, how to improve security

and how to make it foolproof. By itself, it will not solve the terrorist problem. You must look at the causes ... you can't put up barriers all the time."

Mahathir said the Malaysian experience of fighting terrorism had been more effective as the problem had been tackled not only militarily but also through winning the hearts and minds of the people.

On the present situation he said: "Here's a conflict that will go on for a long time. The world will live in fear for a long time because the fight against terrorism is being done the wrong way."

He said terrorism should not be confined to just acts of violence as there were also currency speculators who were economic terrorists whose acts in undermining the value of currencies had caused severe unemployment, riots and death.

"This is an act as wicked as terrorism," Mahathir said.