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Mahathir-Palestine

DR MAHATHIR TAKES ANTI-TERRORISM DRIVE TO THE VATICAN

By: Mahrus Ibrahim

VATICAN CITY, June 8 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's relentless drive at the world stage to help resolve the Palestinian issue and to combat terrorism has taken him into unchartered territory -- the Vatican.

His visit to this Christian heartland, the first ever by a Malaysian head of government, is seen as part of his push for an end to hostilities in Palestine.

Although the trip was at the invitation of Pope John Paul II, the Prime Minister used the opportunity to bring up the Palestinian issue in his four-eye meeting yesterday with the 82-year-old leader of the world's one billion Roman Catholics.

The matter was later discussed at length in his talks with Secretary of State, Cardinal Angelo Sodano and Vatican officials.

"When I met the Pope, I went on to make my plea for an end to terrorism in Palestine and the Israeli action against Palestinians," Dr Mahathir said.

It was a plea that he has been making the world over, from the White House in his meeting with President George W. Bush, to the Kremlin in talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, to Libya in his discussions with Col Muammar Gaddafi, and to audiences gathered at various international forums organised back home in Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir's perspective of the Palestinian issue is very clear.

According to him, the issue in Palestine was not so much of Islam as it was actually a question of people losing their land because Palestinians were being expelled from their property.

"It is not so much religion, it is a fight to regain their property," he said.

But since most Palestinians are Muslims, their plight and sufferings do get sympathy from fellow Muslims worldwide.

The Vatican agreed with Dr Mahathir's perspective on Palestine and shares Malaysia's views that the causes of terrorism have to be removed.

Yesterday's meeting also agreed that there should be third party intervention in Palestine "to separate the combatants" as well as to put an end to terrorism in Palestine through negotiations.

Dr Mahathir said that he was satisfied that the visit to the Vatican had enabled Malaysia to explain Malaysia's stand on the matter.

His next stop over the next five days will be Switzerland and Luxembourg.

Observers said that the issues of West Asia and the threat of terrorism were likely to feature in his official discussions there.

Apparently, there is no stopping the Prime Minister when it comes to promoting world peace.

-- BERNAMA

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