

22 SEP 2002

Mahathir-Letter

DR M WRITES TO BUSH, CHIRAC AND SCHROEDER ON SEIGE OF ARAFAT'S COMPOUND

By: Mikhail Raj Abdullah

COPENHAGEN, Sept 22 (Bernama) -- In an immediate response to besieged Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's plea for help, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has written letters to US President George Bush, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and French President Jacques Chirac on Israel's occupation of his headquarters.

Arafat had telephoned the prime minister on Friday for help from his besieged compound in the West Bank just before leaving Kuala Lumpur for London en route to attend the fourth Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Copenhagen beginning tomorrow.

Responding to questions posed by Malaysian journalists on the sidelines of the preparatory meetings for the ASEM summit here today, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Dr Mahathir was deeply concerned over what was happening in the West Bank.

Dr Mahathir had arrived hours earlier to attend an Asian leaders' meeting in preparation for the informal summit with their European counterparts tomorrow at the Bella Centre.

Dr Mahathir had said in London on Saturday that he feared for Arafat's life and should anything happen to him or be killed, he would be regarded as a martyr which would only lead to increased violence.

He had said that he would write to western leaders seeking their intervention to resolve the siege at Arafat's headquarters by Israeli troops who have already half-destroyed the administrative building.

However, Syed Hamid did not divulge what exactly was written by Dr Mahathir to the three leaders but sufficed to say that the latest onslaught was not going to help the peace process.

Dr Mahathir was also of the opinion that the way to resolve the present Palestinian conflict was through Israeli withdrawal through the political process, he said.

"You cannot ask for one process (political) to be given priority at the expense of the other (security), they must be looked at together.

"People will do this (suicide bombings) if they don't see the certainty of having their own state. So, we must do something about it," he said.

He said Dr Mahathir was expected to raise the matter in bilateral meetings tomorrow with Chirac and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi on the sidelines of ASEM.

While there were concerns that the summit would be pre-occupied with the security concerns following the Sept 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, the ASEM process nevertheless offered an opportunity for the Palestinian issue to be raised given the free flowing nature of the discussions between Asian and European leaders, he said.

Syed Hamid said that in discussing terrorism, there was a need to identify its root causes and among them was the desperation over the inability to resolve the Palestinian issue through the withdrawal of Israeli troops and giving them a separate homeland.

The Palestinian issue needed a political resolution and treating it just as a security threat was not enough, he added.

-- BERNAMA

MR RV TS