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Let UN settle issues, says Dr M

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INTERNATIONAL issues, whether they are on trade or security, should be settled by the international community, specifically the United Nations, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

"For some countries to take it upon themselves to determine how the world should function is a negation of democratic principles, the very principles they preach.

"We should go back and let the international community discuss these matters and determine the course of action, not any group meeting," the Prime Minister said in response to questions at a Press conference at the Palais des Nations here.

He was asked for his views on the forthcoming G-8 meeting in Canada where the rich countries would be setting terms on security in relation to post Sept 11 attacks.

Dr Mahathir was further asked for his views on how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could be settled given that the United States had offered a timeframe for the creation of a Palestinian State.

He said he believed that the US had a big role to play in the settlement of the conflict because it is the most powerful nation in the world.

"If it decides to work to end the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation, a lot of things can be done because of the power and influence it wields."

On another question, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia's stand on the conflict was clear.

"We want Israel to retreat behind its own borders. Nobody has the right to invade another country," he said, adding that Malaysia was against Israel's policy of "forward defence".

This, he added, would make the country, in this case, Palestine, subservient to its stronger neighbour.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia wants the two combatants to be separated by United Nations forces.

"We want all Arab refugees to return to where they came from and an end to acts of terror...the use of helicopters and rockets to escalate the terror in the hope that the use of terror will end terror. This is a mistake," he said.

To another question on the lack of agreement on the definition of "terrorism" at the Organisation of Islamic Conference held in Kuala Lumpur this year, Dr Mahathir said this was because to some Muslim countries, Palestinians who resorted to "acts of terror" did not have a choice in the defence of their home-land.

He said in defining terrorism in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, acts of terrorism must be condemned, but the world must be aware of mitigating circumstances with regard to Palestinians who are desperate in their retaliation of Israel's state terrorism.

"Palestinians have no one to help them. They are desperate. They may turn to acts of terrorism. But what choice have they got? The other party has a choice."

Some 50 international journalists attended the Press conference during which Dr Mahathir fielded 15 questions.

He was asked for his views on terrorism, WTO negotiations in relation to globalisation and on China as an emerging economy.

International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz was also present.

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