

# Ancient city torn apart

STAR 23 FEB 2003

**PUTRAJAYA:** The city of Jenin in the West Bank can trace its history back to over 4,000 years of civilisation, but thanks to the latest Israel invasions starting last April, it is now a crippled town shorn of all basic amenities like proper sewage system, water pipes, electricity supply and roads.

The city, home to about 50,000 people used to have a hospital, but it had since been demolished, just like other administrative and business premises.

According to its Mayor Walid Musa Abu Mowes, the sick and infirm were forced to make the five to six-hour trek to the nearest town to seek medical treatment.

The nearest town, he said, was only about 4km away, but it might as well be 100km away because most of the roads out of the city had been destroyed and those who managed to get out of town were subjected to interrogation by Israeli forces at numerous checkpoints.

"Countless women and children have died at checkpoints while trying to seek medical treatment. Many international non-governmental organisations have tried to intervene on our behalf, but to no avail.

"Jenin is a city under siege. We are attacked by Israeli forces everyday. In the province of Jenin alone, 5,000



**Kuala Lumpur**

homes and buildings have been destroyed and people massacred since last April.

"Our only hope now lies in the international community to exert pressure on Israel. We hope to present our case at the Non-Aligned Movement summit to help spread greater awareness on the plight of the people of Palestine," he told reporters after paying a courtesy call on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at his office yesterday.

Walid said it took him 14 hours to travel a distance of about 80km from Jenin to the Jordanian border and only 10 hours by flight from Amman to

come to Kuala Lumpur for the summit.

The unemployment rate in Jenin, he said, had skyrocketed to 70% and children could no longer go to school because their safety could not be guaranteed.

"Recently a nine-year-old girl was crushed by an Israeli tank that came rolling into the compound of a school.

"Israel accused Jenin of being a breeding ground for Palestinian fighters and with that excuse, they attack us with impunity on a daily basis and

took our land to build a wall as high as 6m around our city.

"I don't know how long we can live without all the basic needs like these. In Jenin, survival and death are now equal ... the price we are paying to live is extremely high," he said adding that all the people of Jenin wanted was to be able to lead a normal life and be able to provide for their families.

Walid also wanted the world community to understand that the Iraqi people would not be the only casualty if the United States persisted with its plan to attack Iraq.

Israel President Ariel Sharon, he said, would seize this golden opportunity to wipe out the Palestine people.

"If there is war in Iraq, Sharon could do whatever he wanted ... intensify the aggression against us, kill or deport us. We will become the other victim of the war because the world spotlight would be on Iraq," he said.

Asked about his meeting with Dr Mahathir, Walid said he presented the compliments and thanks of the people of Palestine and Palestinian president Yasser Arafat to the Prime Minister and the people of Malaysia.

He said the Malaysian Government has also agreed to provide US\$1mil (RM3.8mil) aid to Jenin to help rebuild two schools and the hospital.