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Mahathir-Pope

POPE JOHN PAUL: AN EFFECTIVE, INFLUENTIAL VOICE, SAYS DR M

KUALA LUMPUR, April 3 (Bernama) -- Pope John Paul II was an effective and influential voice, especially in applying pressure on whatever was done by the super powers, former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Pope was a far-sighted person who took seriously various international issues like the problems of Muslims in Palestine, said Dr Mahathir who called on the Pontiff in the Vatican City on June 7, 2002.

"He (Pope John Paul) supported the Palestinians and condemned their victimisation. He also wanted to see a settlement to the West Asian conflict and opposed the occupation of Iraq," he told reporters at his residence in Sungai Besi.

Pope John Paul died at his apartments in the Vatican City at 1937 GMT (3.30am MST) at the age of 84 due to heart and kidney failures after suffering a urinary infection.

Dr Mahathir said: When former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri was still alive, I know he had extensive discussions on the problems his country faced with the Pope.

"Lebanon is a country with many catholic christians and the Pope was prepared to hear the views of all groups, including Muslims."

Dr Mahathir also said Pope John Paul had a balanced view on many issues related to international relations.

He hoped his successor would play a similar role.

On his experience meeting the Pope, Dr Mahathir said: "At that time, I think his memory was still good as he knew what was happening around him.

"He appreciated the role played by Malaysia on the international scene, that's why I accepted his invitation," he added.

-- BERNAMA

YBK AT PR TOM