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PM: Recognise Palestinian rights

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PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the United States-initiated road map to resolve Palestine-Israel conflict has no future unless the rights of the Palestinians are recognised.

The Prime Minister said he did not see an amicable solution to the conflict in the near future as the Palestinians were continuously being victimised and denied the right to their own land.

"The Israelis must evacuate from the land they seized from the Palestinians and they must allow those who were expelled with their families to return," he said at a Press Conference after attending the preparatory briefing of the upcoming 10th Organisation of the Islamic Conference summit at the Putrajaya Convention Centre here.

"Their land and houses must be returned to them."

Dr Mahathir also described the agenda of some newspapers and media organisations which were trying to promote the idea that the Palestinians were reluctant to return to their homeland (which is considered part of Israel now) as nonsense.

"Palestinians want to return provided they are treated fairly, but if they are going to be discriminated against, they don't want to return. They don't want to expose themselves to the atrocities that the Israelis may commit against them.

"Those two conditions must be met."

On the reported Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) case in Singapore, the Prime Minister said:

"There is no SARS in Singapore. Actually the World Health Organisation said it (the reported case) is not (a SARS case).

"SARS must have some lung infection ...pneumonia. But there was no evidence of pneumonia (in the Singaporean patient) after three X-rays. So it cannot be SARS.

"But unfortunately, as usual, the Western Press went to town and the share market has suffered as a result, I'm quite sure people are again cancelling their visits to this area, and our tourism will be affected," Dr Mahathir said.

On the preparations for the OIC summit, he said that 17 leaders have so far confirmed their participation. Many others are expected to confirm their attendance soon.

He said several dry runs would be conducted to ensure the smooth running of the summit, and that Malaysia's experience in hosting big international events such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) would be documented for future reference.

"I'm very satisfied with the progress, but we have to do some fine tuning and this will be taken care of by the Foreign Ministry. The facilities are very good and I expect everything to be ready in time."