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Israel goading US to start fresh war in West Asia, says PM

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CYBERJAYA, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Israel is goading the United States to start a fresh war in West Asia by attacking Syria on the pretext of hunting down Palestinian "terror activists".

The Prime Minister said since the US had been quite reluctant to attack Syria, Israel had made the first move by attacking what it claimed was a terrorist camp in Syria last Sunday.

"Israel has been urging America to invade Syria and the US seems to be reluctant," Dr Mahathir said at a Press conference after opening InventQjaya Sdn Bhd's scientific research and development laboratory here.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on the air strike near Damascus.

So in order to force the hand of America, said Dr Mahathir, Israel attacked Syria.

"Now the Americans will have to support it, otherwise candidates for the US presidency next year will lose Jewish votes."

The Jewish lobby group, which has direct links with Israel, plays a pivotal role in the domestic politics of the US.

Israel mounted the surprise attack on what it claimed was a Palestinian training base in Syria and US President George Bush defended the attack, saying Israel had the right to self-defence.

Malaysia, as chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), has condemned the Israeli military aggression.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar had said the attack was a violation of the Charter of the United Nations, principles of international law and relevant Security Council resolutions.

On whether the Israeli aggression should be brought to the United Nations to prevent any further incidents in West Asia, Dr Mahathir said he doubted if the UN could do anything about the violation.

Even NAM and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, in the absence of unity and a strong resolve, could only condemn the aggression, he added.

Dr Mahathir also said the present fate of Muslims was very much due to their own failure. "That is the problem, because we allow ourselves to become weak, people bully us."

On Singapore's refusal to stop its reclamation work although the International Tribunal for the Law of the Seas had warned the island republic against irreparable damage to the environment, he said the establishment of the international panel of experts to study the effects of the reclamation work must be expedited.

On Russian President Vladimir Putin's participation as an observer at the OIC Summit, the Prime Minister said Putin was invited so that he could have a better understanding of Islam and Muslims.

Dr Mahathir was also asked on Malaysia's future bilateral relations with Australia following the remarks by Prime Minister John Howard that he would not "dignify" criticisms from Dr Mahathir as he (Dr Mahathir) would be stepping down on Oct 31.

Dr Mahathir said: "I leave it to my successor."