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PM: Resolving Palestinian conflict must be given top priority

Patrick Sennyah; Chow Kum Hor

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today urged the United Nations to make resolving the Palestinian conflict its top priority.

Describing the root cause of the dispute as territorial and not religious, he said the Palestinians had been chased out of their homes and farms and were now refugees.

"The Israelis occupy Palestinian territory and settlements. This is all wrong and unless corrected, I doubt anyone can persuade Hamas not to take violent action," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is the Barisan Nasional chairman, said this after chairing a two-hour BN supreme council meeting today.

"Yeah, yeah ...they (UN) can talk about reform, but I do not think they can unless the big powers decide to honour their word.

"It is the most undemocratic organisation I can think of and these people who are undemocratic have no moral right to tell others to be democratic."

On Pas president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang's view that Islam allows Palestinians to carry out suicide attacks to solve their problem, Dr Mahathir said: "I do not share that view. It is not in accordance with Islam to kill innocent people.

"However, we appreciate the fact that the Palestinians have little choice as they do not have proper arms to fight and no army.

"They have to resort to acts that may be considered acts of terrorism. The mitigating factors are there, but nevertheless it is wrong to commit suicide."

Dr Mahathir said Pas' stand showed it was prepared to support the bombing and killing of civilians.

"Fighting is one thing, but if you go on board a schoolbus and kill all the schoolchildren, I don't think it is a brave move."

On a separate issue, he said the Government intended to raise funds locally for its projects and would not turn to foreign funding.

"Although the Government has not decided on the amount to be raised, it could be around RM2 billion and all the money would be from domestic lenders," he said.

On bonus payments to civil servants, Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, said payments would be staggered.

"The quantum would be for half a month and there would be no minimum amount," he added.