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PM: Tackle issue with understanding

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today the issue of anti-Semitism should be approached with better understanding rather than tackling it in a confrontational manner.

"We must not go on a confrontational course but must choose a better way of understanding the issue," he said after chairing his first Umno supreme council meeting as acting party president today.

Asked whether the statement by former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit last month was viewed as confrontational, Abdullah, who took over the premiership last Friday, said Dr Mahathir was only "explaining and making a reference to history".

At the opening of the summit, Dr Mahathir had urged Muslims to learn from the Jews, who now "rule the world by proxy" after having "gained control of the most powerful countries".

The former Prime Minister had come under fire from the Governments of Australia, the European Union and the United States for his comments but leaders of the OIC came to his defence, saying his remarks were not anti-Semitic.

Several organisations had also criticised Dr Mahathir, claiming that he was calling on Muslims to wage war against the Jews.

Elaborating, Abdullah said Dr Mahathir was only explaining what had happened to the Jews, who were persecuted before but were today successful.

Dr Mahathir, he added, wanted Muslims to understand that "today you may be persecuted and there is profiling against Islam, so how do you respond?"

"You must respond with patience, understanding and with knowledge and you must strategise. Then only can you survive."

Abdullah said he knew Dr Mahathir was not anti-Jew, but the Jews were not very happy with the way he had explained things.

On the rising anti-Semitic sentiment in the Arab world, he said it could lead to confrontations.