

Abdullah hopes unity govt can be set up

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi hopes both the Fatah and Hamas factions would quickly form the proposed unity government in Palestine — a crucial move to reopen doors for international aid to the ailing nation.

Abdullah, who is here for the United Nations general assembly, met Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Wednesday.

He said Malaysia supported the formation of a coalition government in Palestine.

Palestine has faced international sanctions that have crippled the government since Hamas came to power in March, after defeating

the Fatah party in the general election held in January.

Many nations have stopped dealing with Hamas and have frozen financial assistance as they consider the party to be a terrorist organisation.

In recent months, there have been unrest in Palestine, including strikes by government workers who have not been paid salaries for months.

Palestine is also expected to face a shortage of food and medicine.

Hamas, however, won the election fair and square and Abdullah told reporters here that he in fact wrote to both parties once Hamas came to power, asking them to

consider formation of a government of reconciliation that could bring peace and stability to Palestine.

“Malaysia has remained committed towards helping Palestine and it has been our official stance for a long time,” Abdullah told newsmen at a Press conference before leaving New York.

Kuala Lumpur has extended a US\$16 million (RM58.9 million) emergency assistance to help several local government authorities in Palestine continue functioning.

He said Malaysia sees the problems in Palestine as one that concerns not only security but also human rights.

“What is left now is only 22 per cent of the original land area belonging to the Palestinian people. The rest have been seized by Israel,” Abdullah said.

He said Abbas thanked Malaysia for its support and said he would continue working with Hamas leader and Palestinian prime minister Ismail Haniyeh towards forming the unity government in Palestine.

The move to form a coalition government experienced hiccups recently when Abbas was reported as having frozen talks with Hamas following the latter's continued refusal to accept existing peace accords with Israel.