

PM: WE MUST BE HEARD



We in Asean must make our voices heard, loudly and clearly

Abdullah

KUALA LUMPUR: Asean should condemn Israel's use of "disproportionate force" in the Middle East, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, calling it a threat to international peace.

"We in Asean must make our voices heard, loudly and clearly, that we cannot continue tolerating the subjugation and repression of the Palestinian people by Israel.

"This has been one of the most profound tragedies of our time," he said when opening the Asean Ministerial Meeting here yesterday.

The Mideast crisis is expected to figure prominently in talks among foreign ministers of the 10-member Asean. The meeting will be followed later in the week by the Asean Regional Forum, with participants from Asia and the West, including US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

Rice is expected in Kuala Lumpur tomorrow after her diplomatic foray to the Mideast, where she is pushing a plan that will call for a ceasefire simultaneous with the deployment of international and Lebanese troops in southern Lebanon to prevent Hizbollah attacks on Israel.

In his speech, Abdullah spoke on the plight of the



Reports by Syed Nadzri, Wan Hamidi Hamid, Farrah Naz Karim, Shamini Darshni and Arman Ahmad

Palestinians. He said the international community must bring about a resumption of the Mideast peace process, which was in tatters. At the core of the issue was the Palestinians' suffering and humiliation for 60 years.

"This is a fact which speaks poorly of the efficacy of international diplomacy. But the international community cannot continue to evade its responsibility of finding a comprehensive, just and durable solution which should include bringing into being an independent state of Palestine," he said.

Moving on to the use of force in Lebanon, he said the punishment inflicted on Lebanese people and the destruction of towns and cities were unconscionable.

"The military incursions into Lebanese territory are blatant disregard for Lebanon's sovereignty.

"The United Nations Security Council should call for a ceasefire, deploy a UN peacekeeping force to implement the ceasefire and prevent an invasion of Lebanon by Israel," he said.

Yesterday, Asean foreign ministers issued a statement condemning acts of terror, violence and destruction in the occupied Palestinian territory and in Lebanon.

The statement urged all parties to exercise restraint, in particular to avoid additional casualties among civilians and damage to civilian property and infrastructure.

The ministers also urged Israel and Palestine to return to the peace process.