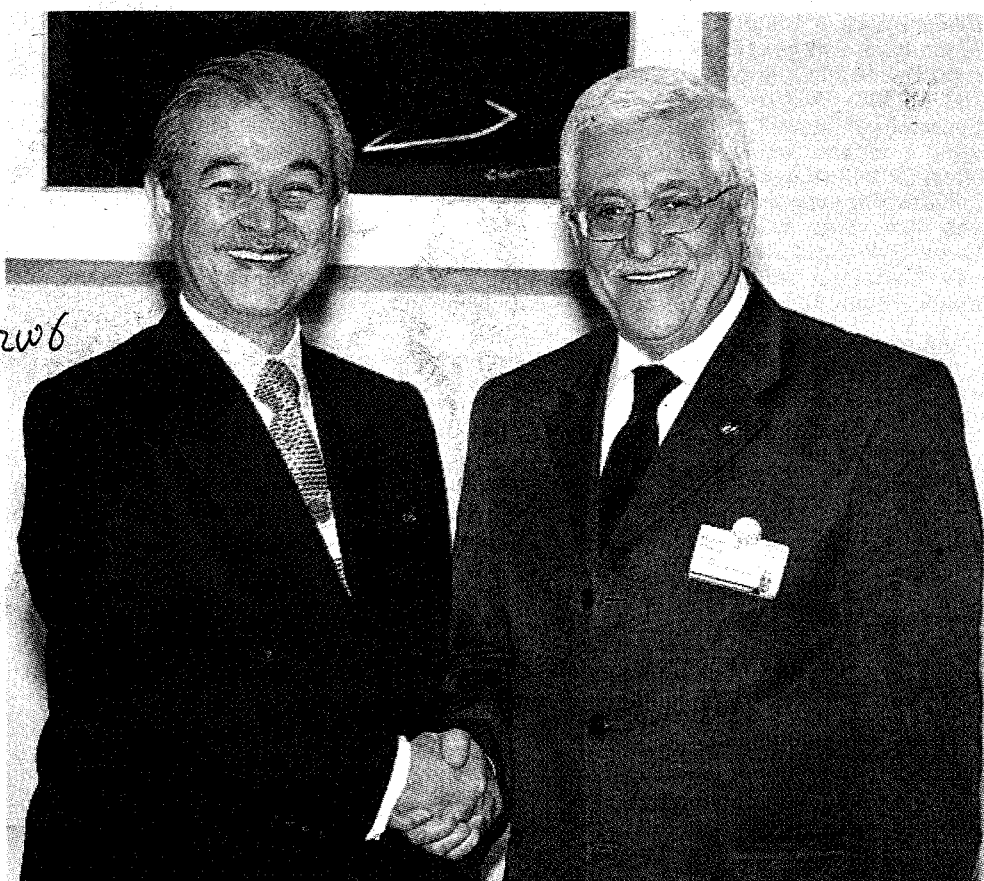


Abdullah offers to help mediate in Iraq

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SHARM EL-SHEIKH (Egypt): Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has offered to talk with the warring parties in Iraq to try to influence them to choose peaceful means to resolve their problems.

As chairman of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), he said he was keen to explore new options towards resolving the problem in Iraq so that its people could lead a normal life and rebuild their war-ravaged nation.

"I would like to do this as soon as possible," the Prime Minister told a press conference on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum here yesterday.

He added: "But of course the fighting groups in Iraq must be in agreement and be willing to enter a ceasefire."

He reiterated that lasting peace in Iraq could be achieved only if the occupying forces pulled out.

He added, however, that the pullout could not be done in haste and a more viable alternative had to first be put into place - either in the form of an OIC or United Nations-led effort.

"Whoever is to lead such an

FOR POSTERITY: Abdullah and Abbas posing for photographers at the World Economic Forum held in the Egyptian resort of Sharm El-Sheikh on Saturday.

effort must ensure that all the stakeholders in Iraq are included," Abdullah said.

At another press conference after meeting Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas on Saturday, Abdullah said Malaysia was giving US\$16mil (RM57.6mil) to help finance the running of 16 local councils in Palestine.

The funds, he said, would be channelled through Abbas as constitutionally he was still

head of state despite his party losing in the last Palestinian election.

He said other contributing nations should also resume their aid.

"If they really want to help, there are always means and channels that can be worked out. It is certainly not acceptable that the flow of aid be stopped simply because the people have put in place a new legislative

council."

Speaking at the same press conference, Abbas said he had accepted Abdullah's invitation to visit Malaysia.

"Malaysia and its people are very dear to the Palestinian heart. I have accepted the invitation and will decide on the date later," he said.