

Backing for Pakistan's Mid-East peace drive

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PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia strongly supports Pakistan's initiative to resolve the Middle East crisis.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said he welcomed the idea of a Muslim grouping that would examine the troubles in the Muslim states and perhaps come up with fresh momentum in bringing peace to the region.

In a joint Press conference with Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf yesterday, Abdullah, who is the current chairman of the world's largest grouping of Muslim nations, the Organisation

of the Islamic Conference, noted that Middle East peace efforts had been futile despite many attempts.

"The crisis in the Middle East is of great concern to us... and not easily resolved.

"Violence seems to be escalating instead of stopping. It is my hope as it is his (Musharraf's) that we would be able to meet in a bigger group to examine further the causes and reasons for whatever that is associated with the Middle East situation," he said after meeting Musharraf, who is here on a working visit.

The Pakistani president, who arrived from Indonesia on Wednesday, also visited Egypt,

Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the United Arab Emirates to enlist support for an "extension of the process of consultation towards a new initiative by a group of like-minded Muslim countries towards resolution of disputes and bringing harmony to the Muslim world".

Musharraf said although his new initiative to address the Middle East conflict was not a guaranteed success, there was no harm in trying as the present strategies by many international organisations had failed.

"One can't guarantee that we will succeed. But with all the problems that we are facing around the world, at least it is

worth a try.

"The situation is deteriorating. Through a new initiative, we hope to turn this around. What we can try is to convert this downward slide to an upward momentum towards a resolution of disputes," Musharraf said.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar later said the new initiative would not undermine the role of the 57-member OIC.

"I don't think it will. It's a process of consultation."

He said the next step of the initiative should be a meeting between leaders of the nations involved so that they could decide on a plan of action.