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Dr Mahathir as peace-maker

KUALA LUMPUR: Kyrgyzstan is appealing for former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's help to broker peace between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks following two weeks of bloody clashes between the two ethnic groups in the southern part of the country.

The Central Asian country's ambassador to Malaysia, Dr Bakir Uulu Tursunbay, said Mahathir, as Malaysia's elder statesman who is well respected in the Muslim world, would be acceptable to both parties and based on his vast experience was suitable to undertake the peace-making role.

Bakir said he had requested to meet Mahathir and hoped it would happen soon. "We believe our people, both Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, will listen to people like him. As a Muslim and a neutral person, he can contribute positively to peace-making efforts and the confidence-building process," Bakir told Bernama in an interview at his office.

News reports said clashes between the ethnic-majority Kyrgyz and the minority Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan this month had killed as many as 2,000 people and forced some 400,000 ethnic Uzbeks to flee to Uzbekistan.

Bakir said Mahathir was well-known in Kyrgyzstan among the two ethnic groups as he had visited the country of some 5.5 million people twice in 1996 and 1997.

Bakir said Mahathir, who served as prime minister for 22 years and as chairman of the Perdana Global Peace Organisation, had the necessary ability and wide experience in peace-making efforts.

"We sincerely hope he will accept our invitation. In any conflict or crisis one side will listen (to the government) and another not. So we need a neutral leader who can satisfy both sides," he said.

Mahathir is believed to be overseas and an aide said the Kyrgyzstan request had been conveyed to him.

On Sunday, the Kyrgyz went to the polls for a referendum and the results show that 90.7% of voters backed a new constitution paving the way for the October parliamentary elections in the country, reports Reuters.