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Dr M rules out global mediator role

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NEW YORK: Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has ruled out taking up the role of an international mediator similar to the ones performed by former British prime minister Tony Blair or former US president Jimmy Carter.

He said this during an informal meeting with Malaysian students on Saturday at the Malaysian United Nations (UN) mission in New York.

After the conferring of the Rafik Hariri UN Habitat Memorial Award on Mahathir Friday night, some guests were privately asking if he would make a good mediator for resolving international disputes, given his wide-ranging international experience and his elder statesman status.

"No, I don't think I am qualified for such a role," he told Bernama, adding in a lighter vein that the "world will not listen to me and people will do what they like ... so, I would discount such a role."

Mahathir looked relaxed as he fielded questions from the students on issues ranging from the political situation in Malaysia and Malaysia's transition to a developed nation, to the China-Japan conflict.

"You need a strong government



Mahathir receives the prestigious Rafik Hariri United Nations - Habitat Memorial Award from Rafik Hariri Foundation president Nazek Rafk Hariri, who is also Hariri's widow.

to manage a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious country like Malaysia," Mahathir noted.

He also advised the students not to forget the culture and values they brought from home when studying in the West.

"We begin to change in terms of our values and culture after staying in developed countries. Some may even say that we (in Malaysia) are not as progressive as in the countries where you have studied.

"When you compare something good with something better, then

your own country doesn't look so good. But when you compare your country with something not so good, then even the bad things begin to look good," he told the students.

He also urged Malaysian students to return home after completing their studies and offer their expertise for nation-building.

"Help Malaysia realise its goal of becoming a developed country by 2020," Mahathir said, pointing out that Malaysia, despite the global downturn, was still growing and "defying gravity", as the *Financial Times* recently put it.

He said Malaysia was blessed by nature and, unlike some of its neighbours, had not been at the receiving end of

natural disasters.

Mahathir also spoke against corruption, saying that the person giving bribe was as guilty as the person taking it.

On the recent riots in several Muslim countries over an anti-Islam film made by an individual in the US, he said he favoured freedom of expression but there were limitations to it, particularly when it hurt the feelings of others.

On the escalating China-Japan tensions and the US role in the conflict, he said: "... You have to be willing to compromise and strike a balance."

He cited Malaysia's examples in reaching deals with its neighbours by taking a "reasonable stand" when conflicts or issues arose. - Bernama