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PM explains Gaza visit

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Najib: It was a humanitarian gesture of solidarity

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CAIRO: Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said his visit to Gaza was a humanitarian gesture of solidarity with the plight of the people in the occupied territories and should not be misconstrued as an attempt to interfere in domestic Palestinian affairs.

The Prime Minister said he had explained this to Palestine's Waqaf Minister Mahmoud Habash in Cairo on Tuesday evening after returning from Gaza, following criticism over his visit by the Fatah faction of the Palestinian Authority (PA), which is opposed to its Hamas-led rivals who control Gaza.

"My trip to Gaza was based on humanitarian grounds and to show our strong support for the struggle of the Palestinians.

"It must not be misinterpreted as interfering with the internal affairs of Palestine but to show our concern to Palestinians especially during the eight days of violence committed by Israel in its attack in Gaza late last year," Najib told Malaysian reporters here yesterday before departing for Davos, Switzerland, where he is scheduled to attend the World Economic Forum.

Hamas and Fatah have been in dispute since 2007, resulting in Gaza being controlled by Hamas and the West Bank, the other territory, which also makes up Palestine, under Fatah.

Najib said besides conveying Malaysia's position to the Palestinian Minister, he had also contacted PA



Brief chat: Najib speaking to Malaysian students in Cairo during his visit. — Bernama

chairman Mahmoud Abbas by telephone on Monday night to explain the reasons for his Gaza visit before he went to the Palestinian territory the following day.

"Fatah was uneasy with my visit to Gaza but we explained to them that I had to make a stand to visit the area. The issue of the plight of the Palestinians in Gaza is something very close to Malaysian hearts," he said.

The Prime Minister said his original intention was to visit both Gaza and the West Bank.

He explained that he was unable to go to the West Bank because unlike the Egyptian controlled border into Gaza, the entry points into the territory under Fatah were under the purview of Israel.

He said Israel would have only

allowed him entry if Malaysia accorded Israel official recognition, something that was against Malaysia's policy.

Najib said his visit to Gaza and his meeting with Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi also allowed him an opportunity to express Malaysia's support to the Egyptian initiative to bring Hamas and Fatah closer.

The rival groups signed an agreement in May last year to discuss the aim of setting up a unity government in Palestine.

"Hamas and Fatah need to set up a unity government as soon as possible for their common struggle to succeed. In all my meetings, I stressed the point repeatedly that accord between the West Bank and Gaza was a precondition for the Palestinians to achieve their goal,"

he said.

On a separate matter, Najib expressed his condolences to the family of the Malaysian killed during the hostage drama in Algeria.

"I sympathise with the family. This is something that can happen and is very hard to predict. I hope his family remains strong in facing this tragedy," he said.

Najib said there had been discouraging reports about the fate of the second Malaysian hostage reported missing, adding that Wisma Putra was keeping a close watch on the developments.



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