

POST-WAR REDEVELOPMENT

'MALAYSIA MUST TAKE INITIATIVE FOR GAZA'

PM slams critics of Malaysia's effort to rebuild Palestinian enclave

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has hit out at those questioning Malaysia's move to assist in the rebuilding of Gaza.

Without singling out anyone, he said several parties, including a former national leader, had made sarcastic remarks on the government's effort to reconstruct Gaza through the Malaysia Wakaf City project.

Anwar stressed that Islam was not about differentiating or marginalising people when it came to providing assistance to those in need.

"Some say it (the effort undertaken by the government to help with the reconstruction of Gaza) is not enough... there were also those who claimed that we are not serious. (This project is) worth hundreds of millions.

"Then, there are those who think they are wise. A former leader once said, 'Even our schools are not complete, yet we want to help others'.

"If we help another village, people might say, 'Your own village isn't done yet', but in Islam, we never think that way," he said during an event at Al-Muttaqin mosque, Taman Meru, here.

His comments followed criticism from former international trade and industry minister Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz and Julau member of parliament Larry Sng, both of whom said the government should focus on helping Malaysians first.

Anwar, who is Tambun member of parliament, said Malaysia must take the initiative to bring about change in easing the burden of the people in Gaza.

He added through the Malaysia Wakaf City project, Malaysia would build a school, a hospital and a mosque in Gaza to alleviate the suffering of the people there.

Anwar also said the Malaysian and Japanese governments had agreed to rebuild Gaza through



A malnourished Palestinian girl resting at the International Medical Corps field hospital, amid the Israel-Hamas war, in southern Gaza Strip on June 22 last year. REUTERS/MOHAMMAED SALEM/FILE PHOTO

the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEA-PAD).

"Since World War 2, this has been the most devastating catastrophe to befall both Muslims and humanity.

"Their land is completely obliterated, and they continue to face humiliation.

"Children, women and schools have been wiped out, and when we try to help, even in small ways, what is their response? 'Oh, we should focus on solving our own problems'.

"Problems within our own country will never be fully resolved, not even until the end of time, as there will always be shortcomings.

"At the very least, we are doing something by contributing to the Gaza redevelopment," he said.

In Kuala Lumpur, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi reaffirmed the government's steadfast commitment to prioritising the welfare of its citizens.

"However, we must not forget our friends and families in Gaza and the eastern regions of Palestine," he said during a visit to Media Prima Bhd headquarters in Balai Berita, Bangsar.

Zahid emphasised the importance of supporting Anwar's commitment to assist in Gaza's reconstruction.

Meanwhile, Bernama reported that Malaysia and eight other countries will convene in The Hague to discuss their shared commitment to uphold interna-

tional law, responding to threats against the International Criminal Court (ICC), and defending Palestinian rights.

The other nations are Belize, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Honduras, Namibia, Senegal and South Africa.

Following the meeting, the nations are expected to form "The Hague Group" and will announce "coordinated legal, economic, and diplomatic measures" to hold Israel accountable for its violations of international law, including its ongoing actions in Gaza, at a press conference organised by Progressive International, an international political organisation.

"The Hague Group is born of necessity," said Progressive International co-general coordinator Varsha Gandikota-Nellutla in a joint statement.

"In a world where powerful nations act with impunity, we must stand together to defend the principles of justice, equality and human rights."

The statement also quoted Anwar as saying Israel's violations "go beyond the mass murder and persecution of Palestinians".

"They strike at the very foundations of international law, which the global community has a duty to defend," he said. **Additional reporting by Amisha Syahira**

Page 1 pic: Buildings in Jabalia, northern Gaza, lie in ruins after more than a year of Israeli strikes.