

# Dr M remembers Pope as a voice against injustice

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad remembers the late Pope John Paul II as a man "clear in thought" who spoke against violence and injustices.

"His passing means that another effective and influential voice is gone," the former prime minister said.

"It was a voice that could lessen the strain being brought about now by the major powers," he said, adding that the Pope's death was a great loss not only for Roman Catholics but also for the whole world.

"He supported Palestine.

"He tried not to be biased and gave due consideration to international issues. He also did not support violence, like in Iraq," he added.

Dr Mahathir was the first Malaysian head of government to lead a delegation to the Vatican.

Among those who accompanied him on the visit in 2002 were former Energy, Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Amar Leo Moggie and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Bernard Dompok.

Dr Mahathir said the meeting with the Pope was recognition by the pontiff of Malaysia's role in the international arena.

He praised John Paul II as a great man who managed to keep Roman Catholics together despite the many internal problems faced by the church.

Dr Mahathir's wife, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, recalled that the

visit was one where not only the Catholics in the delegation were honoured to meet the pontiff.

"We talked to him and thanked him for allowing us to come and see him. We knew he could not talk much because he was quite old," she said, adding that the Catholics in the group received the Pope's blessings.

Moggie, who is now chairman of Tenaga Nasional Berhad, praised John Paul II - the priest, bishop and Pope - for his fortitude and determination in leading the Catholic community through his long and serious illness.

"The Pope has become a symbol of leadership, and people of all communities sincerely respect and admire him for his work in promoting dia-

logues among religions and cultures," he said.

Dompok said the Pope's concern about the welfare of Catholics worldwide was reflected in his knowledge about the community in Malaysia.

"In fact, the Pope was conversant about this country, its economy and how many Catholics and Christians there were in Malaysia," he said.

Dompok, who first met the Pope in 1991 and then in 2002 when he accompanied Dr Mahathir to the Vatican, said: "I felt I was in front of holiness and greatness."

"This was a man who led 1.2 billion Catholics around the world and yet you could feel the simplicity within the person," he added.