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Mahathir-Clinton

MALAYSIA TO GIVE US\$10 MILLION TO BUY ARMS FOR BOSNIA

By: Salmy Hashim

WASHINGTON, May 22 (Bernama) -- Malaysia today agreed to contribute US\$10 million (about RM25 million) to arm and train the Bosnian army to defend the Balkan state.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced this after meeting President Bill Clinton at the White House here.

Dr Mahathir told Malaysian journalists that Malaysia was responding to an invitation by Clinton who in a letter to Dr Mahathir had asked Malaysia to give financial aid for buying arms and training the Bosnian troops to defend themselves.

Clinton has also asked Islamic countries in West Asia to contribute US\$100 million for this purpose.

"Clinton's view is so different from that of (leaders of) Europe who feel that Bosnia does not need to be given arms," he said after the 20-minute meeting, their second since Clinton assumed office in 1993.

The Malaysian military contribution, which is a first by the country, would be extended to Bosnia as soon as possible, he said.

Malaysians have been very sympathetic to the Bosnians and have donated millions of ringgit to help ease their sufferings.

There are also about 1,500 Malaysian soldiers serving in Bosnia under the Nato-led Implementation Force (IFOR).

Malaysia's Ambassador to the U.S. Datuk Dali Hashim said the meeting between Dr Mahathir and Clinton was a very good one.

"The Americans were excited with the good rapport between the two leaders and the meeting plus the correspondence reflected the desire by both to maintain personal contacts," he told reporters after the meeting.

He said Clinton also sought Dr Mahathir's views on China and asked him to speak out in America that China must remain engaged and not isolated in the interest of peace and security in the region.

Dr Mahathir, who has long emphasised the need for dialogue to resolve international problems, congratulated Clinton for agreeing to extend the Most Favoured Nation status for China for one more year.

A White House spokesman said the discussions were mainly on China.

Both leaders agreed that in the interest of China and its neighbours, it was better to work together and engage China rather than to isolate it.

"Because of its size and potential, it is destined to become a great nation in the early part of the 21st century," the spokesman said.

Dr Mahathir said he also expressed his concern on the killing of civilians in Lebanon by Israel in retaliation against attacks on its territory.

He urged the U.S. to advise Israel against doing this.

He described his relationship with Clinton as quite good, saying they frequently wrote to each other whenever international issues arose.

Dr Mahathir today had nine meetings, including with U.S. Congress members, American and international corporate leaders and Malaysian students.

Meanwhile, in KUALA LUMPUR, Defence Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar said Malaysia did not expect major problems in training the Bosnian armed forces, as it has wide experience serving in the Balkan state under the Unprofor and Ifor.

He said Malaysia is willing to share its experience and knowledge with the Bosnian armed forces so that they could look after their country's

peace and stability.

Malaysia, he said, always holds the view that in order to create a lasting peace in that country, there should be a military balance apart from economic and civil reconstruction which are being carried out now.

"In this context, as far as Malaysia is concerned, we are happy to contribute in whatever way we can so that Bosnia can be securely looked after by the Bosnians themselves," he added.

Syed Hamid said the Malaysian Armed Forces have facilities such as the Armed Forces Staff College to train Bosnian military officers. -- BERNAMA