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Mahathir-Islam

ISLAMIC COUNTRIES CAN CREATE CONDITIONS FOR GLOBAL PEACE, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, April 14 (Bernama) -- Malaysia and Egypt have recognised that Islamic countries have the capacity to play a crucial role in creating conditions for global peace and stability, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

The prime minister said this could not be achieved unless Muslims truly believed in the Islamic brotherhood and ceased to use Islam as an excuse for lulling other Muslims and undermining the political stability of Islamic nations.

In West Asia, the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict escaped solution because of Israeli duplicity and its high-handed ways, he said at a dinner in honour of his Egyptian counterpart, Dr Kamal El Ganzouri, at Sri Perdana, here.

He said it was sad and regrettable that Israel's actions, which deserved the strongest condemnation, were being condoned by certain countries,

"Israel deserves every kind of sanction and yet we see sanction being applied to weak countries for minor breaches of human rights," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia appreciated the active role played by Egypt in the West Asia peace process.

Dr Mahathir said President Hosni Mubarak's untiring efforts to bring an end to the conflict in spite of Israel's intransigence deserved the whole-hearted support of all.

He said Malaysia would not have any meaningful relations with Israel until that country learnt to honour agreements entered into by its legitimate government.

On trade relations between Malaysia and Egypt, Dr Mahathir said it had increased steadily over the years but the value of trade was still small and confined to only a few products.

He said Malaysia viewed Egypt as the ideal trading partner and as an excellent channel for reaching other Arab and African states.

Malaysia would encourage its private sector to explore opportunities for trade in Egypt.

He said the Malaysian government viewed positively the chamber-to-chamber cooperation and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) concluded between the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry Malaysia and the Egyptian Businessmen's Association in 1993.

The prime minister said that in the spirit of Islamic solidarity and South-South cooperation, Malaysia and Egypt had also established the necessary legal framework to enhance bilateral relations between the two countries.

He said the two countries had signed various cooperation agreements such as trade, technical, scientific, cultural, economic, and air transport and currently, other new agreements were also being finalised in the areas of investment guarantee, wakaf and religious affairs, tourism, avoidance of double taxation, and science and technology.

However, in spite of all those avenues for cooperation, there was insufficient interaction in most of those areas between the two countries.

He said Malaysia had always looked to Egypt as a leader of the West Asian/African Bloc and Malaysia attached high priority to developing closer cooperation with Egypt.

"Yet we have not succeeded in relising the quantum and quality of

cooperation that goes with such high regard," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was peculiar that in spite of long history of people-to-people relations, this relationship was still stronger in spirit than in substance. -- BERNAMA

SJA JK