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Malaysia-Lebanon

MALAYSIA PLEDGES SUPPORT FOR LEBANON AGAINST ISRAELI AGGRESSION

By: Mokhtar Hussain

BEIRUT, June 18 (Bernama) -- Malaysia has expressed support for Lebanon against Israeli aggression and pledged to do its best in international forum to ensure the withdrawal of Tel Aviv troops from the Lebanese southern territory.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said as a country once invaded by Japanese troops, Malaysia sympathised and understood the feelings of the Lebanese people.

"(Help) Not by fighting of course but through diplomatic means," he said at a luncheon during yesterday's visit to the port city of Sidon, about 50km from the southern border of Lebanon, being occupied by Israeli soldiers.

The luncheon was hosted by Sidon governor Mrs Bahia Hariri, a sister of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri.

Sidon, some 43km south of Beirut and the birthplace of Hariri was not affected by the Israeli aggression and is now a popular seaside tourist spot among Lebanese picnickers.

"But you can still hear shootings and bombings in the south. They (the Israeli) are even trying to build a settlement in that area," said a Lebanese official here.

Dr Mahathir also expressed Malaysia's stand on the issue in a private meeting with Hariri, here, earlier.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said both leaders agreed that the West Asian peace process would not materialise as long as Benjamin Netanyahu is the prime minister of Israel.

"They felt that as long as Netanyahu leads Israel, there will be no sign of peace in West Asia as the Jewish leader adopted a confrontational attitude and ignored the Israel-Palestine peace accord initiated by past leaders," he said.

Though several Syrian tankers and military security posts were seen in certain areas near Sidon, the development in Sidon was clearly evident with the construction of highways and condominiums overlooking the Mediterranean Sea.

Syria is Lebanon's close ally since the Muslim-Christian civil war broke out in 1975 and Israel's invasion on Palestinian settlements in Lebanon. -- BERNAMA

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