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Mahathir-Banquet

MALAYSIA TO HELP LEBANON RETURN TO ITS FORMER GLORY

By: Mokhtar Hussain

BEIRUT, June 16 (Bernama) -- Malaysia has offered to help Lebanon to return to its former glory as the premier business centre of West Asia.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Monday he hoped Malaysian businessmen accompanying him in his trip could be given an opportunity to participate in the reconstruction of Lebanon.

He assured the Lebanese government that many of the businessmen and their companies had played a key role in the economic transformation of Malaysia and are familiar with the economic and physical rehabilitation of a country.

"We do not know what role we can play in the reconstruction of Lebanon...We are sure that Lebanon will rise again. The remarkable recovery currently underway is a testimony of Lebanon's indomitable spirit," he said at the state banquet hosted by his Lebanese counterpart, Rafic Hariri, in honour of his three-day official visit to Lebanon.

The prime minister said Malaysia was aware that Lebanese prosperity will not only contribute to the well-being of the West Asian region but also to Malaysia who wish to trade and interact economically with Lebanon.

Dr Mahathir said: "The renowned entrepreneurial spirit of the Lebanese people and their determination to help the country to resume its traditional role as a dynamic commercial and cultural centre for the entire region is sufficient for Malaysia to want to participate in your reconstruction."

He said Malaysia understood and sympathised with the pains and deprivation suffered by Lebanon because of the prolonged civil war which was aided and abetted by foreign interests.

"From being one of the world's most sophisticated centres of commerce and culture, it is sad and regrettable that Lebanon had been reduced to a scarred battlefield," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was however impressed that Lebanon has begun in earnest to rebuild itself and is determined to lay the foundation for durable peace, both at home and in the region.

Saying Malaysia was delighted that Lebanon had already accomplished a great deal, Dr Mahathir congratulated Hariri for his strong leadership and his singlemindedness in leading the Lebanese people in the immense task of reconstruction.

The prime minister also spoke about the "smart partnership" concept between governments, nations and regions.

He told his audience that in Southeast Asia, the idea was applied to accelerate Asean development.

"Besides devising elements of complementarity for our manufacturing industries, we have also made efforts to promote joint development among Asean countries through growth triangles involving adjacent territories of neighbouring countries," he said.

The national policies of Asean member countries, be they economic or trade, were designed to "prosper our neighbour", rather than impoverish them, said Dr Mahathir.

"Poor neighbours create problems. Rich neighbours make good trading partners," he said.

Dr Mahathir suggested that West Asia experiment with the "prosper our neighbour" policy to accelerate development in their region.

He pointed out that a key element for regional peace is the acceptance

by all of the settlement of problems between and among neighbours through negotiations.

"Failing this we resort to third parties, such as the World Court. Where justified we would rather share what is disputed than try to take all for ourselves through costly confrontations and the destruction of what is claimed," he said.

As for Malaysia, the prime minister said, it "simply cannot countenance aggression by anyone, whether friend of foe".

He said in West Asia, Israel must realise that the threats it perceives were a direct consequence of its own action.

"Any country that forcibly takes over land and property belonging to others, that destroys other people's dwellings in order to erect its own settlements, cannot be said to be sincere in wanting peace."

"Yet Israel tries to justify its actions by accusing its neighbours of threatening to retaliate, then all aggression must be condoned," he said.

"What kind of a world will we create if aggression and disregard for world opinion is considered right? Israel must learn to reject violence as a solution to its so-called security problem," Dr Mahathir said.

Stressing that "violence is not the solution (but) good-neighbourliness and sincerity are," he said Malaysia fully sympathises with the people of Lebanon as their lands had been taken away from them.

"We fully support United Nations resolution 425 and consider its implementation as being the only suitable and acceptable way for the establishment of peace in Lebanon," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the current Israel government must also honour commitments made by the preceding government, saying "if a new government scuttles solemn undertakings by the previous government, how do we conduct international relations?"

While pointing out that the Jews found sanctuary in Muslim countries when they were persecuted in Europe, "no one -- Arab, Palestinian or Muslim -- regards Jews as their eternal enemies.

"What is required is a change in the current Israeli government's mind-set which condemns Muslims and Arabs as their eternal enemies. This mind-set prevents any real progress towards peace," he added. -- BERNAMA

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