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Showing concern for ummah

Farush Khan in Doha

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad expressed satisfaction with the greater commitment and concern over the fate of Muslims and Muslim countries by leaders at the ninth summit of the Organisation of Islamic Conference held here.

The Prime Minister said the leaders, in their discussions and speeches at the three-day summit, which ends today, had demonstrated "high spirit" in the interest of the ummah, especially in the Israel-Palestine disputes.

"Their speeches were strong and they were open (in their criticism)," he told Malaysian journalists after a dinner with about 100 Malaysians, including about 30 who are residing in Qatar, at the Diplomatic Club here on Sunday night.

The dinner was hosted by Ismail Mustapha, the Ambassador of Malaysia accredited to Qatar.

For example, he said, there were leaders who had proposed that Muslim countries sever their diplomatic relations with the United States if it moved its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Such a move by the US will be a clear indication of its endorsement of Israel's occupation of the Palestine territory in Jerusalem.

Dr Mahathir was asked on his evaluation of this year's OIC summit. The OIC holds its summit once in three years.

In his speech on Sunday, Dr Mahathir, who represented the Asian group, delivered a strong warning against the Israeli aggression against the Palestinians.

He had called on leaders of the 56 OIC member countries to "remain steadfast in making no compromises" on the status of Al Quds Al Sharif (Jerusalem) as the political and historical city of the Palestinian people and State.

The Prime Minister's hard-hitting speech at the summit was prominently featured in local newspapers yesterday.

The Peninsula English language newspaper quoted Dr Mahathir as saying that he believed much of the blame for the Islamic world's inability to counterbalance hegemony by certain powers was because of its own discord and infighting.

The paper described Dr Mahathir as "a Malaysian leader who had always been something of an iconoclast".

Referring to another of the Prime Minister's strong-worded speech delivered to Qatari entrepreneurs and intellectuals on Saturday night, it said Dr Mahathir had "stayed true to form" as he attacked Western institutions for trying to impose their will on developing nations.

Dr Mahathir said the spirit of unity was also evident among the leaders of the OIC members.

On his proposal to reform the OIC and the establishment of the Muslim Direct Investment fund to promote economic and trade activities among the Muslim countries, he said there was no official response to it as yet since the summit was still in progress.

The proposal on the need for reform of the OIC had been included in the agenda for deliberation among the leaders.

The Prime Minister also held bilateral meetings with Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, Sudanese President Omar Hassan Al Bashir and other leaders since his arrival here on Saturday.

Meanwhile, Bernama reports Dr Mahathir as saying that Senegal President Abdoulaye Wade wanted more Malaysian investments in the republic.

"He pointed out Senegal's potential, including that in the cotton (industry) and other areas," said Dr Mahathir.

Omar Hassan Al Bashir also invited Malaysia to invest in a big hydroelectric project in Sudan.

"We are studying that," said the Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir said the Sudanese leader also wanted to see Malaysia's participation in the transport sector.

He said Hariri proposed that direct flights be operated between Lebanon and Malaysia.

"He is also prepared to grant fifth landing rights to us to enable us to take passengers in Lebanon before proceeding to other destinations."

Dr Mahathir said Somalian President Abdi Kassim Salad informed him that his Government had just been restored and wanted Malaysia to make investments in the republic.

Crown Prince Abdullah was also keen to further enhance Riyadh-Kuala Lumpur ties, he said.

Prior to his departure last night to Brunei for the Apec meeting, Dr Mahathir is scheduled to meet Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazbayyev, Syrian President Bashar al-Asad and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

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