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Mahathir-Bush

MALAYSIA URGES US TO SOLVE PALESTINIAN ISSUE

By: Mohd Kamel Othman & Ridzuan Zulkifli

SHANGHAI, Oct 20 (Bernama) -- Malaysia has urged the United States to solve the Palestinian issue in its fight against international terrorism following the Sept 11 attacks on New York and Washington.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that by doing so, it would reduce the feeling of frustration and anger in the Muslim world.

Speaking to Malaysian journalists after having bilateral talks with US President George W. Bush on the sidelines of the Ninth Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Leaders Meeting here, Dr Mahathir said: "I explained to him to remove the causes of terrorism and I singled out the problem in Palestine as the most important cause."

Present at the bilateral talks were International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

However, Dr Mahathir said, they both agreed that the Palestinian issue could not be settled overnight.

"It's difficult but he thinks that it must be resolved and this is something that we agree on," he said.

He said Bush told him that he has been urging Israel and Palestine to settle their conflict and accepted that there should be a Palestinian state and in return, the Palestinians must accept Israel as a Jewish state.

"He (Bush) himself said that he does not want to be in the public eye making photo opportunities with regard to the middle-east issue but he has taken interest (in the issue) and he wants to try and resolve it," he said.

Asked if Bush made a request that Malaysia, as a moderate Islamic country, play its role in combating terrorism, Dr Mahathir said: "He did mention Malaysia as a moderate Islamic country and believes Malaysia has a role to play."

"He seems to think that we have a role to play in the Muslim world and I explained to him the anger and frustration of the Muslim world and he seems to appreciate my views and understand what I said," Dr Mahathir added.

The prime minister said he also explained why Malaysia could not support the US-led air strikes on Afghanistan in retaliation for the Sept 11 attacks.

In the Sept 11 devastating attacks, hijackers crashed airliners into the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, killing about 5,600 people.

Dr Mahathir said Bush explained America's viewpoint and the feelings of the American people as a result of the attacks.

"I think our views and their views are different on the issue so I did not push, except we say that we cannot support," he said.

"I think he accepts the fact that we differ on certain issues but we see eye-to-eye on this very important issue of terrorism and also the need to revive the world's economy because he feels that countries cannot develop unless world trade is restored."

Dr Mahathir said that on the whole, it was a good meeting which began with Bush thanking him for writing a letter recently explaining his views on combating terrorism.

Bush also thanked Malaysia for its support to the US in its fight against terrorism.

At the meeting, Dr Mahathir said, he also explained at length how

Malaysia dealt with the communist insurgency and solved the problem of dissatisfaction on the part of the Chinese population in Malaysia and eventually the laying of arms by the communists.

The prime minister said he also touched on the need to prosper other countries like what Malaysia did in resettling the 10,000 Vietnamese refugees who entered the country.

"We worked with Vietnam in order to restore its economy and we were able to repatriate the 10,000 Vietnamese in Malaysia. So that is another reason why we should help people to become prosperous," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that Bush wanted bilateral relations between Malaysia and US to be further strengthened. "That is something I think that we want to do with them," he said.

The prime minister said Bush also wanted to know about the situation in Indonesia and Malaysia stressed the need to support the present government under President Megawati Sukarnoputri because Indonesia needed a strong and credible government.

He said Malaysia would like to see the situation in the republic settled. "There will be a fallout when they are not well and the tendency is for them (Indonesians) to migrate to Malaysia, he added.

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