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KL, Dublin

say war 'is no answer'

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia and the Republic of Ireland have expressed their common view that war is not the best way to resolve a conflict or dispute, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said yesterday.

He said the two countries believe the best approach to settle any problem, whether domestic or international, was through dialogue and diplomacy.

The stand was expressed jointly by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the Republic of Ireland President Mary McAleese during their 40-minute meeting at a hotel, here.

McAleese, accompanied by her husband Dr Martin MacAleese, arrived here last night on a four-day visit, the first by an Irish head of state.

She is leading a 55-member delegation which includes Minister of Science and Education Noel Dempsey, government officials and businessmen.

"She (McAleese) and Mahathir are of the view that war will not solve problems. Only through dialogue and multi-lateral processes can problems be resolved," he said after the meeting.

Also at the meeting were Mahathir's wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Irish Ambassador to Malaysia Daniel Mulhall and National Unity and Social Development Minister, Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman, who is the minister-in-attendance.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia and Ireland has a long history in bilateral relations, especially in the education sector.

Ireland is one of the preferred destinations of Malaysian medical students.

Total trade between Malaysia and Ireland totalled RM6.5 billion. Malaysia is Ireland's main trading partner in Southeast Asia. Malaysia is also the third most important market for Ireland outside the European Union.

Earlier, McAleese was accorded a ceremonial welcome at Parliament Square.

She was greeted on arrival by the

Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Putra Jamalullail and Mahathir.

The national anthems of both countries were played by the band from the Royal Armoury Corps before McAleese inspected a guard-of-honour mounted by 108 officers and men from the First Battalion of the Royal Malay Regiment led by Mej Abu Samah Mad Noh.