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Lebanon-Ties

LEBANON WANTS TO STRENGTHEN TIES WITH MALAYSIA

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

KUALA LUMPUR, May 6 (Bernama) -- Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, who arrives here tomorrow for a three-day visit, said it will provide an opportunity for both countries to strengthen ties especially in the economic field.

He also said that he was looking forward to meet Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, "a friend of mine as well as a friend of Lebanon and the Arab world".

"I will discuss with the Prime Minister the situation in the Middle East and the future of peace in the region because this is a subject he cares about a lot as a man of peace, as a Muslim leader, and as a friend of the Arab world who has always supported the just cause of the Palestinian people and the rights of the Arabs," he said in an e-mail reply to questions submitted by Bernama.

"We will also discuss ways to strengthen the relationship between Malaysia and Lebanon," he said.

Saying that the political relationship was excellent between the two countries, he said that the Malaysian government had always supported Lebanon especially during the Israeli occupation of Lebanon.

"But we have to raise the economic relationship and our levels of trade to match the relationship in the political field," he said.

Asked if Dr Mahathir's trip to the United States would also feature in their talks, Hariri said that the visit comes at a very crucial time for the Arab and Muslim world.

"It comes after the visit of Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah and the King of Morocco, His Majesty King Muhammad VI and other Arab and Middle Eastern leaders and in the midst of the consultations the American administration is doing to formulate its policy toward the region and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

"I will listen to His Excellency who will no doubt talk about his upcoming visit to Washington.

"But I am sure that the Prime Minister's views on the situation in the region and his support for peace based on international legality and United Nations resolutions will help encourage the American administration to push ahead with its peace efforts," he said.

He said that it would also convince the American administration that the Arab and Muslim consensus in support of peace should not be expended on transitional and piecemeal solutions but rather on a comprehensive settlement.

Asked to comment on the United Nations' decision to cancel a fact-finding panel in Jenin, Hariri said that Lebanon, just like Malaysia, also regretted the UN decision and considered it a very dangerous development and precedent for the international community.

"What this decision says to the rest of the world is that intransigence pays and that there are different standards for different countries.

"This shows that Israel is getting away with murder, literally, and under the eyes of the whole world.

"It also undermines the authority of the United Nations and its mandate," he said.

Hariri said that if nothing was done to undo the situation and hold Israel accountable, no country in the world would respect the will of the international community from now on.

"We will live under a jungle law and not the rule of law," he said.

He said that the policies of the Israeli regime and their war on the Palestinians were creating a lot of anger in the Arab World.

"As a matter of fact, what (Israeli Prime Minister Ariel) Sharon did in his war against the Palestinians is that he not only destroyed their infrastructure and their cities, and demolished the camps on the heads of the families that live in them, but also and more importantly, he destroyed the idea of peace and the philosophy of peace.

"What is needed now is something as big and on the same scale of what Israel has done to restore confidence among the parties and restore faith in the idea of peace," he said.

He said that there were different ideas being circulated now to try to advance the peace agenda and restore normalcy to the region.

"But these ideas cannot bear fruit if they do not address the core issues of the conflict, mainly ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese lands, and if the peace that is being advanced is not comprehensive," he said

Hariri yesterday met a delegation of US congressmen in Beirut who was there to rally support for a proposed international conference aimed at bringing Israel and the Palestinians to the negotiating table.

"The Arabs have made their strategic decision to make peace but the question on every Arab mind now is whether we have an Israeli partner for peace. Sharon is not a man of peace, he is a warmonger," said Hariri.

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