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OIC-Mahathir

MAHATHIR'S EXIT UPSETS LEADERS OF ISLAMIC NATIONS

By: Azman Ujang

KHARTOUM, June 28 (Bernama) -- Many leaders of Islamic nations are upset over the impending resignation of Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad which will take effect after October next year.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said that over the last several days, he met Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in Beirut, Sudanese President Omar Hassan Al Bashir and a number of foreign ministers here and all said that Dr Mahathir's resignation was not welcome in Islamic countries.

"In fact, they are upset over it as Dr Mahathir is an Islamic leader who's firm and bold in expressing his views," he told a group of Malaysian students and staff of Petronas at a gathering at the Grand Holiday Villa Hotel here yesterday.

Syed Hamid, who is here to attend the annual meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) told Bernama in an interview earlier that there were a lot of questions raised and worries expressed by the leaders as to whether Malaysia would be able to continue to play its role on the international front.

They said that Dr Mahathir had established a name and reputation as an Islamic leader with integrity and tremendous credibility and support among Islamic countries.

They also wanted to know how the change of leadership would affect Malaysia politically and economically.

"I had to explain to them the process of succession, the leadership hierarchy structure to reassure them that although Dr Mahathir has been pivotal to Malaysia's development, he is going to leave a sure-footed country politically and economically and that Malaysia would not abandon its role.

"A lot of them feel a sense of loss and worry even. I spent a lot of time to reassure them and I think I could allay some of their fears and this is good for the country," Syed Hamid said in the interview.

He said that by naming Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as his successor, Dr Mahathir showed the country's interest was paramount to him so as to bring Malaysia forward into the globalised 21st century.

"That I think is reassuring...they feel comfortable and we need to continue to build up the same type of confidence and continue with what we have been doing all this while," he said.

The foreign minister said that the "burden" on Malaysia on the international front was getting heavier as more and more countries were looking to it to play the lead role, crediting the country as a model Islamic state.

"We have been a successful nation without compromising our Islamic values and the question that is often asked is how did we go about it," he said.

Syed Hamid said that Malaysia's experience showed that respect was something that had to be earned and it was able to have its own seal in world affairs and international relations through strategic thinking.

If this was not done, all efforts would not be focused and Malaysia would not have been respected as a country which projects the positive image of Islam.

"We have shown that Islam is a religion not inconsistent with modernisation and that it is relevant and flexible and I think this we have

reflected very well.

"People respect us when we give our views because we match our words with action. Sometimes we can come out with beautiful rhetorics but if it is not accompanied by action, then it goes to nought, and we do not move from one position to another position," he said.

Asked on the reforms initiated by Malaysia on the Jeddah-based secretariat of the OIC, Syed Hamid said that the secretariat must move with the times and had to be reorganised to fulfil the aspirations of the 57-member grouping of Islamic countries.

Malaysian consultants were currently working on the reorganisation and their proposals were expected to be ready for approval by OIC leaders at their summit in Kuala Lumpur in October next year.

He said that the 32-year-old organisation had to gain more confidence to be able to participate more actively and to influence the course of world events.

For this to happen, he said, it had to gain credibility as well as to gain confidence not only among outsiders but among the members themselves in order to move forward and to make a difference.

"Problems of under-development and economic cooperation are real issues that cannot be put aside. The OIC must have the vision and be pragmatic. It's better to do the small things than trying to be over-ambitious and achieve nothing," said Syed Hamid, adding that Malaysia was sad that the grouping continued to be perceived as an organisation that indulges more in rhetoric and devoid of action.

"OIC continues to be perceived as an organisation that adopts numerous resolutions and decisions but unable to effectively implement them. Instead of being able to seize the initiative, we appear to have been marginalised," said the minister who is critical of the present OIC format of having far too many issues on the agenda of its meetings.

He also disclosed that at the Kuala Lumpur OIC summit next year, the OIC secretariat, which has for a long time been headed by a secretary-general from the Arab-speaking countries, would be replaced by a candidate from Asia.

Asked if a Malaysian was in line for the job, he said: "Malaysia is one of those countries that people have talked about".

-- BERNAMA

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