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Mahathir-Palestine

NEGOTIATION NOT ANSWER FOR PALESTINE, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: Mohd Arshi Daud

KUALA LUMPUR, April 16 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said that negotiation is not the key to resolve the escalating tension in Palestine.

"It is our believe that you can't negotiate when guns are pointed at your head. Israel must withdraw first," he told a joint press conference with his Moroccan counterpart Abdurrahmane Youssoufi here Tuesday.

The joint press conference was held after a meeting of delegates from Malaysia and Morocco, headed by prime ministers of both countries. Dr Mahathir had earlier held a meeting with Youssoufi.

Dr Mahathir is leading a 185-member delegation, comprising cabinet ministers, officials and businessmen for a four-day visit to Morocco.

The visit is part of his week-long tour of three countries, including Libya and Bahrain, to strengthen the economic and ties between Malaysia and the respective countries.

Dr Mahathir said the best way to end terrorism is to remove its root causes, one of which is the Israeli invasion of Palestinian territory and its refusal to evacuate.

"But there are other causes which take the form of oppression of Muslims in many parts of the world," he said.

He said both Youssoufi and himself agreed that the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) should consolidate its position and hold a common view on how to tackle this problem.

"Malaysia will be hosting the OIC meeting next year and we hope that we can reach agreement on a unified stand in order to deal with many problems affecting the Muslim world," said Dr Mahathir.

Echoing Youssoufi's hope that his visit would enhance trade and investment of both countries, the Prime Minister said the signing of six agreements between parties from the respective countries would contribute towards this objective.

Dr Mahathir and Youssoufi had earlier witnessed the signing of investment guarantee pact, memorandum of understanding (MoU) for cooperation in information and communication technology, MoU for cooperation in industrial promotion and MoU for cooperation for export promotion.

On Malaysia's side, the first two agreements were signed by Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar while the other two by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry Deputy Secretary-General Sidek Hassan and the Director of Malaysian External Trade & Development Corporation (MATRADE), Sukandar Abdul Latiff.

Two other contracts were signed by Petronas president and chief executive Tan Sri Mohd Hassan Marican for two reconnaissance contracts with the Office National de Recheres et d'Exploitations Pétrolières (ONAREP), the national oil company of Morocco.

The signing was for an onshore area in the Missouri Basin and the ofshore Rabat Sale Haute Mer Area.

The contracts would lead to the granting of Reconnaissance Licences by the Moroccan Ministry in charge of Energy.

Dr Mahathir said there should be follow-up visit between the public and private sectors of both countries not only to implement the agreements signed today but also to bolster relations in general.

On his meeting with Youssoufi, Dr Mahathir said it was a very

successful and fruitful one as both sides were able to discuss issues related to bilateral relations and international affairs.

Malaysia, he said, regards Morocco as an important Islamic country and a greater cooperation with the latter would contribute towards solidarity of the Muslim community.

Earlier during the delegation meeting, Dr Mahathir offered Moroccans to study at Malaysia's Multimedia University.

"This would contribute towards increasing the capacity of Moroccans to deal with the information communication technology," he added.

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