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Syed Hamid-Mahathir

US WILL BE URGED TO FIND POLITICAL SOLUTION IN WEST ASIA

By: Jaafar Hussin and E.Sivabalan

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will urged the United States to find a political formula to end the Israel-Palestine conflict in efforts to bring lasting peace to West Asia.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Sunday that this was one of the main issues to be raised by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in his meeting with President Geoge W, Bush at the White House on Tuesday.

Malaysia's stand was that terrorism would not resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict but could further aggravate the overall situation in West Asia, he said when briefing Malaysian journalists, here.

He said the prime minister would recommend that the peace effort by Crown Prince Abdullah Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia be made an integral part of the Bush administration's initiative to find a solution to the conflict in West Asia.

Saudi Arabia's proposal, among others, calls for Tel Aviv to give up all the occupied territories in Palestine and in return Israel would have the right to set up an independent state.

During the meeting, which is scheduled to last 35 minutes, Dr Mahathir is also expected to give Bush an assurance of Malaysia's cooperation in the fight against international terrorism.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia, as a moderate voice on peace and security, would also raise trilateral issues including the Afghan issue.

The prime minister is scheduled to arrive at the Andrews Air Force base Monday for a four-day official visit.

Besides talks with Bush, he is also scheidunged to meet Vice-President Dick Cheney, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and acting Secretary of State Richard Armitage.

Syed Hamid said the main aim of the visit was to restore and further strengthen Malaysia-US political relations.

He said bilateral relations in defence, economy, investments and other fields had been strong but there was tension in political ties during the administration before Bush's.

"That's why we now want to restore political ties in view of the latest global developments like cross-border crime, terrorism and security in the Southeast Asian region," he said.

Syed Hamid said that since the first meeting between Dr Mahathir and Bush when the two leaders attended the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Conference in Shanghai, China, last October, they had become closer personally.

He hoped that Dr Mahathir's visit would not only strengthen personal ties between the two leaders but also relations between Malaysia and the US.

He said the two countries would also sign a Declaration for Combatting International Terrorism during the visit.

The declaration, to be signed by Syed Hamid and Armitage, would reflect Kuala Lumpur's determination to continue to work with the US in fighting global terrorism, he added.

On the Malaysia Trade, Security and Economic Cooperation Caucus to be launched by Dr Mahathir Tuesday, Syed Hamid said it would serve as a bridge for Malaysia to convey accurate, complete and the latest information on any development involving Malaysia to the relevant parties in the US.

It was also to foster networking and friendship between the two countries.

He said that for a country that played an important role in global trade, such a mechanism was important to ensure that there was no vacuum that could cause any misunderstanding.

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