

18 AUG 2003

Mahathir-Muslims

MALAYSIA WILLING TO SHARE KNOWLEDGE TO HELP FELLOW MUSLIMS

By: Mokhtar Hussain

DAMASCUS, Aug 18 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is ever willing to share its experience with other countries, especially its Muslim brothers, in developing strategies and policies to enable them to be developed, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia was willing to "expose everything" that it had achieved so as to help other countries to develop.

"We are quite willing to open our book to show all things that we have done and that will include strategies, policies, laws, systems and practices where it can fit Syria," he said at a joint press conference with his Syrian counterpart Mustapha Miro after co-chairing a delegation meeting at the latter's office here.

Dr Mahathir was replying to questions from Arab journalists on how Malaysia could assist Syria to develop the Arab republic.

Like Syria, he explained, Malaysia initially had no technological know-how and lacked capital management skills and understanding of the world market.

However, Malaysia had encouraged foreign investments, and in the process its people were able to acquire technological know-how and marketing skills, he said.

"So even if Syria has no technology at the moment, if it is prepared to have joint ventures and allow foreign investment, it can also learn and acquire the technology.

"Today, Malaysian companies can produce all those things that before would require foreign investors," he said.

Dr Mahathir arrived yesterday for a two-day official visit at the invitation of President Dr Bashar Al-Assad. He has witnessed the signing of 12 MoUs and agreements between the two governments and private companies of the two countries.

The pacts signed include those between Bank Negara Malaysia and the Central Bank of Syria; Proton Berhad and Modern Technology; Multimedia Development Corporation (MDC) and Syrian Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance; and the Malaysian National News Agency (Bernama) and the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA).

On globalisation, Dr Mahathir said developing countries should work closely together so that it would benefit them instead of merely benefiting the rich and powerful nations.

"The present interpretation (of globalisation) will only benefit the rich and powerful, and poor countries are still being exposed to exploitation the way they impoverished us during the financial crisis in Asia in 1997," he said.

Asked on the situation in West Asia, particularly Iraq and the Arab-Israel conflict, the Prime Minister said Malaysia was very unhappy with developments in the region, adding that the root of the problem was the creation of the Israeli state from Palestinian land.

"We may not be able to put an end to Israel but in order to achieve peace in this region, Israel must withdraw completely behind its borders and allow the Palestinians who have been expelled and lived as refugees abroad to return. After that there should be no more attacks against citizens either by the Arab or Israeli forces," he said.

Dr Mahathir also commented on the U.S-brokered road map, saying it was incomplete as it isolated Palestine from its neighbours including Syria.

He said the issues on Palestine and the situation in Iraq were discussed during his meeting with President Assad, and he hoped to meet the President again.

Asked on the possibility of the United States seeking extradition of the Malaysian wife of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) operations chief Hambali, Dr Mahathir said there had been no such request from the U.S. authorities.

Malaysia would only deal with the matter when there was a request, he said.

Hambali and his wife, Noralwizah Lee Abdullah @ Lee Yin Len, were arrested by Thai and U.S. authorities at Ayutthaya, north of Bangkok, last Monday.

Noralwizah has since been taken to Malaysia for further investigation.

To a question by a Malaysian journalist, Prime Minister Mustapha said he believed Malaysia could play a role in the unification of the Islamic world, especially with Kuala Lumpur hosting the OIC summit in October.

Mustapha said he believed it could be realised under the leadership of Dr Mahathir, who he said "has the attitude and high interest of the whole Islamic world".

-- BERNAMA

MOK JM YBY