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Mahathir-Hariri

MAHATHIR REMEMBERS RAFIC HARIRI WHO PUT ASIDE PROTOCOL FOR FRIENDSHIP

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 15 (Bernama) -- Former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic al-Hariri, who was assassinated yesterday, put aside protocol for the sake of friendship, said former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad today.

He said Rafic used to drive him from the airport to his house at the Koraytem Palace when he visited the country either officially or after his (Dr Mahathir's) retirement.

"He always put me up in his house rather than a hotel during the visits.

"We don't consider protocol at all. He drove me from the airport to his house. When he came to Langkawi, I drove him around myself," Dr Mahathir told reporters at his office at the Petronas Twin Towers here.

Dr Mahathir was shocked upon hearing that Rafic was killed in a car bomb attack in Beirut.

Although it was a rare occasion for a leader to stay in another leader's residence during a visit, Dr Mahathir said that was the way it was with them.

"For him to drive me from the airport to his house is already unusual. We are very close to him and his family," he said.

Rafic visited Malaysia in 1997 and Dr Mahathir reciprocated the visit to Beirut later in the same year. After his retirement as Prime Minister in October 2003, Dr Mahathir also visited Rafic.

"I am very much saddened because Rafic was a good personal friend. I cannot understand (his assassination) because he is not the prime minister. He is not even identified with the opposition. So why was he killed? Who killed him is something that still puzzles me," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the death of Rafic was a great loss to Lebanon and the Muslim world because he regarded Rafic as a great Lebanese patriot and also a great Arab leader who contributed to rebuilding Lebanon which was devastated by civil war.

Dr Mahathir said Rafic shared his vision to have peace in Lebanon where people of different religions could live together and to ensure that the country was restored to its previous prosperity and glory.

He hoped that the incident would not escalate into further violence in the Arab world.

"I am quite sure there will be some violence. I hope it will not happen because this idea that you should seek revenge is what is destroying the Arab countries.

"In Islam, of course, we believe in an eye for an eye but it should stop once you have obtained the satisfaction. But if an eye for an eye is followed by more eyes for eyes then there is no end.

"You kill me, my people will kill you, your people will kill my people, my people will kill you. That is not an eye for an eye. That has not been prescribed by Islam," he said.

Asked what would happen to the world today when people who were no longer in power were still targeted by assassins, Dr Mahathir said:

"I think the world has become very violent and this culture of violence has spread because today people enjoy violence.

"If you look at (shows on) the TV, the cinema, the stress is on violence and sex and it affects people...young people...even in our country," he said.

Dr Mahathir retired as Prime Minister in October 2003 after leading the

country for 22 years while Rafic resigned as the Lebanese premier four months ago.

-- BERNAMA

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