

PM to US: Broker immediate ceasefire

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia called on the United States yesterday to use its influence to broker an immediate ceasefire in Lebanon and Palestine to stop the suffering of the people there as a result of the Israeli attacks.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi believes that the US, which has the greatest influence on Israel, can succeed in procuring a ceasefire to prevent more loss of lives and devastation in the two countries.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Abdullah

made the call in his 40-minute meeting with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at Parliament House yesterday.

"I think no party can stop what's happening unless it has the clout and strength to make the move. For us, now is not the time to blame anyone. The important thing is to stop the devastation and the deaths of innocent civilians, women and children," he told reporters at the Parliament lobby.

Syed Hamid said Rice took note of Malaysia's views in positive light. "The message was understood

(by Rice) and she said that it's not a simple matter. She has to handle it carefully to get all the parties involved in the ceasefire to ensure that it is sustainable," he said.

He said Abdullah also voiced his concern that if the crisis was not overcome quickly, it would cause anger and disappointment over what was happening in Lebanon and Palestine.

He said Rice would return to West Asia after attending the Asean Regional Forum (ARF) today to continue with efforts to find a solution to end the conflict.

"She is prepared to continue negotiating. She need not return to the US from here. Because the matter is complicated, she will return to that area from here to continue talks with leaders in West Asia," Syed Hamid said.

Meanwhile, Asean and the US took their relationship a notch higher yesterday with the signing of a landmark plan of action to boost trade, investment and political ties.

The agreement - the Framework Document for the Plan of Action to Implement the Asean-US Enhanced

Partnership - is a follow-up to what both sides had agreed to work on at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) meeting in Busan, South Korea last November.

The pact was signed by the 10 Asean foreign ministers and Rice.

On political and security aspects, Asean and the US agreed to explore the possibility of convening an Asean-US summit, enhancing cooperation at the United Nations on issues of mutual interest such as UN reforms and matters affecting international peace and security. - Bernama