

Nasrallah says no alternative to Hezbollah's strength in Lebanon

By Dana Khraiche

BEIRUT: Hezbollah Chief Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah hoped Monday for continuous dialogue among rival leaders in Lebanon, but maintained a firm stance against the March 14 coalition's demand of disarmament saying there was no alternative to the resistance party.

"There is no choice but to sit and launch dialogue as no one aims to eliminate the other. I hope that they [the March 14 figures] are allowed to continue dialogue," Nasrallah said in a televised speech.

He added that dialogue is the means to dissipate fears regarding Hezbollah's arms.

Nasrallah also rejected his rivals' allegations that his party sought to control the state, saying: "We never did and would never do such a thing."

He said Hezbollah had the opportunity to control the state during the 2008 street clashes between Beirut residents and Hezbollah supporters, but added that any March 14 party would have sought such a thing if the opportunity arose.

Nasrallah also addressed other March 14 allegations against his party that Hezbollah's arms prevent the creation of a true state in Lebanon, saying that sectarianism and political corruption were the main obstacles.

"There is a fundamental problem. You cannot build a national, modern state based on sectarian quotas, leverage and disputes. No true state can be created but the one we are living in now," Nasrallah said.

He added that political corruption and a lack of a national identity were also obstacles standing in the way of a true state.

The Hezbollah chief spoke of the fear of Hezbollah's arms being solely in the hands of one party and one sect, but said that there was no real alternative to the resistance party in defending Lebanon against Israeli aggression.

"Is there a deterrent force equal to the resistance's capabilities?" he asked. "For the military to become a deterrent it requires reinforcements if it is to at least equal the strength of the Israeli army."

He added that there has not yet been any initiative to strengthen the military.

A fierce debate over a national defense strategy capable of resolving the issue of Hezbollah's

arms has resurfaced in the country following the resumption of National Dialogue sessions last month.

The March 14 coalition insist that Hezbollah's arsenal be incorporated within the Army, while Nasrallah has said that cooperation between Hezbollah and the military would serve as a better defense mechanism.

In a speech last week, Nasrallah said that the resistance group could not fall under the command of the Army as the state lacked the ability to resolve even the most basic of challenges.

Nasrallah said Monday that Israel's primary fear in the region is the resistance party, which serves as a deterrent for attacks against Lebanon.

"For Israel, the resistance is considered the main threat to its interests," Nasrallah said, adding that Israel fears attacking Lebanon.

Nasrallah described as criminal the recent attack in the Sinai peninsula that killed 15 Egyptian guards, adding that it was unfortunate the perpetrators linked the incident to Islam and the resistance.

"It is unfortunate that such an act is attributed to Islam, religion, Jihad and the resistance," he said, warning that such a mentality was a threat to the entire region.