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LEAD Abdullah-Israel

MALAYSIA TO REVIEW TRADE TIES WITH ISRAEL IF PEACE TALKS FAIL

KUALA LUMPUR, June 21 (Bernama) -- Malaysia said today it will review all trade ties with Israel if the Tel Aviv government under new Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refuses to continue the peace efforts in West Asia.

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today any policy to either improve or terminate all relations with Israel depended on developments in future.

However, the decision of the government to allow Malaysian businessmen to have trade relations with Israel can continue for the time being, he told reporters after receiving religious video tapes from Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Abdul Hamid Othman.

Early this year, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced that private sector trade with Israel would be allowed after Tel Aviv showed willingness to negotiate for peace in the region, particularly with the Palestinians.

Abdullah said Malaysia viewed the West Asian peace process seriously as it supported the right of the Palestinians to establish their own independent Palestine.

"Whatever relations with Israel at whatever level or form depended on whether we are satisfied or not with the role Israel plays in making the peace talks a success," he said.

Abdullah said Malaysia could seek an improvement in ties with Israel if it demonstrated sincerity and a positive attitude to the peace process.

He said Malaysia began trading with Israel after former Israeli premier Shimon Peres had made serious efforts to achieve success in the peace talks.

"So far we don't know the stand of Netanyahu because he has just been making statements without taking any action. But whatever policy we have on relations with Israel can be reviewed whether to improve or to terminate," he said.

On the United States intention to oppose United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali if he seeks a second term, Abdullah said Malaysia would make its stand known soon.

He said Malaysia's opinion of Boutros was well-known and Dr Mahathir himself had openly called on Boutros-Ghali to resign for his failure in handling several international issues.

"We are dissatisfied with the role played by Boutros-Ghali, particularly on the issue of Bosnia-Herzegovina and many others.

"Since the United States has made a stand on Boutros-Ghali, Malaysia will also do so," he said, adding that no candidate has yet been proposed for the post.

Earlier at the presentation of the video tapes, Abdullah hoped they would help staff of Malaysian missions abroad and their families to improve their knowledge in the Islamic religion. -- BERNAMA

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