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Abdullah-Fiji

MALAYSIA WILL HELP FIJI OVER INDIGENOUS PROBLEM

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 5 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will continue to cooperate with and help Fiji in drafting its new constitution, Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi said today.

He said Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni L. Rabuka had informed him that efforts were underway to draw up a new constitution for the republic.

"Malaysia has sent a legal expert to help them in this field," he told reporters after attending a delegation meeting between Malaysia and Fiji in the Prime Minister's Department, here.

The hour-long meeting was chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Rabuka after a private meeting between them.

Rabuka, accompanied by his wife, Suluweti Rabuka, arrived here yesterday leading an 18-member delegation for a three-day visit aimed at further strengthening relations between the two countries.

Abdullah said Court of Appeal judge Datuk Dr Zakaria Mohamed Yatim had been appointed international legal counsel to the constitutional review of Fiji for a year to help the Fijian government review its 1990 constitution. The appointment was funded by the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme.

Abdullah said Fiji's hope to rejoin the Commonwealth would be brighter with the new constitution.

Malaysia hoped that Fiji would be re-accepted into the Commonwealth but it would take time and support from all the member nations.

Fiji was expelled from the Commonwealth in 1987 after the military regime led by Rabuka toppled Prime Minister Timoci Bavadra and the Indian-majority coalition in a coup and declared it a republic.

Asked whether the Fijian government would use the Malaysian constitution as a model for its constitution, Abdullah said Malaysia's experience could serve as a guideline for the Fijians.

Discussions on Malaysia's methods which had proven successful in developing the bumiputeras, especially in the economic field, were also given emphasis and Fiji had expressed its intention to get Malaysia's help in its study on its economy.

Abdullah said the 800,000 Fijian population was divided into indigenous Fijians and Indian Fijians. The indigenous economy lagged behind that of the Fijians of Indian descent.

"Prime Minister Rabuka wants to do something to help the indigenous Fijians. Malaysia is one of the countries successful in developing the economy of the bumiputeras in various ways, either in the law, training or establishment of certain institutions," he said.

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir had suggested that Permodalan Nasional Berhad (PNB) be one of the institutions to give aid to Fiji and he hoped that Malaysian officers would immediately follow up on this matter.

He said Dr Mahathir also told Rabuka that Malaysia constantly gave serious attention to nations of the South Pacific and Fiji was an important country.

Active relations between the two countries had been fostered since Dr Mahathir's official visit to the republic in 1982 but bilateral trade had not risen as quickly as hoped.

Abdullah said trade was in Fiji's favour as Malaysia bought 99.6 per cent of its raw sugar or RM52.7 million worth from Fiji last year. --

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