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Abdullah-Pacific

MALAYSIA HAS NO INTENTION TO INFLUENCE OTHER NATIONS, SAYS ABDULLAH

KUALA LUMPUR, July 21 (Bernama) -- Malaysia has no intention to influence other nations when commencing economic cooperation and trade with them, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

"We don't want to influence them...that is not our way," he told reporters in response to an Australian government secret report that says that Malaysian influence over the South Pacific countries is growing as its timber firms help prop up some regional rulers, while others look to Kuala Lumpur to counter Australian influence.

The Malaysian economic involvement in the Pacific nations was limited to good approaches that were accepted by these countries, Abdullah said after opening the Second Asean Congress, here, organised by the Malaysian Institute of Strategic and International Studies (Isis).

The conference, held ahead of the Asean Ministerial Meeting on Thursday, gathers leading scholars, thinkers and top officials of the region for a three-day discussion on the future of the regional grouping.

Abdullah said: "Our involvement there (in the South Pacific) is doing what we are supposed to do...if our approaches are accepted by them, why should I listen to those who don't agree with them?"

Abdullah also said that Malaysia's economic cooperation with another country was based on basic good political relations.

On the report, he said he had not seen it. "If the report is meant for us, send us a copy," he added.

The 98-page report, a briefing for Australian Treasurer Peter Costello, alleges, among other things, that Malaysian logging interests helped Solomon Islands leader Solomon Mamaloni to remain a political force and had also supported Papua New Guinea leaders.

Fiji had also sought closer ties with Kuala Lumpur to counter Australia's dominance of the South Pacific, says the report that a wire agency reporter picked up from a table in a hotel.

The report was said to have been prepared by treasury officials with help from the foreign affairs department and security agencies and was ranked "AUSTERO" (AUSTRALIAN EYES ONLY), or far higher than just "top secret".

Malaysia's relations with Australia are perceived to have returned to an even keel following the 1993 fallout between Canberra and Kuala Lumpur when the then Australian Prime Minister, Paul Keating, branded Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad "recalcitrant" for not attending the inaugural Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) summit in Seattle. -- BERNAMA

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