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HK-Visa

MALAYSIA TO REVIEW VISA RULING FOR HONG KONG VISITORS

By: Tham Choy Lin

HONG KONG, June 30 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will review its decision to impose visas on Hong Kong visitors after the territory is returned to China, said Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who is also Home Minister has agreed that the ruling be reviewed and it would be done as soon as possible, Abdullah told reporters after calling on Hong Kong Chief Executive-designate Tung Chee Hwa here today.

"I informed Tung that it was not the intention of Malaysia to send any kind of signal that we lacked confidence in Hong Kong. In fact, we congratulate Hong Kong on the successful negotiation it that has taken for its independence from the British and we rejoice with them," he said.

Abdullah said he discussed the matter with Dr Mahathir, who is currently in London on leave, on the telephone last night after getting feedback from Malaysian Commissioner Zakaria Sulong on the situation here and the feelings of the Hong Kong administration.

Several Malaysian businessmen also came to see him about the matter after he arrived here as Malaysia's representative to the handover ceremony scheduled midnight today.

The visa, to be imposed on all Hong Kong visitors from Oct 1 after a three-month grace period, was the main topic of discussion between Abdullah and Tung.

Asked on the feedback from the business community on the visa ruling, Abdullah said they were concerned and felt it reflected a lack of confidence especially at this juncture of Hong Kong's return to China.

The visa requirement was also expected to affect the number of Hong Kong tourists to Malaysia estimated at more than 100,000 a year.

During the 15-minute meeting at his office, Tung was happy that Malaysia had sent a representative to the historic celebration which he said was important to the Hong Kong people because they were going to be independent of colonial rule, said Abdullah.

He said Tung, who will be sworn in in the early hours of tomorrow, was confident of Hong Kong's future and its contribution towards the modernisation of China under the "one country, two systems" principle.

The future leader also hoped that Malaysia would continue to support and improve its trade relations with Hong Kong.

"It has always been our intention to continue our relations in whatever we can including economic relations that we have all these years.

"Malaysians have benefited from the trade and investments in Hong Kong or in Malaysia," said Abdullah.

At Present, Hong Kong citizens holding British National (Overseas) Passport and the British Dependent Territory Citizen (BDTC) document travel visa free to Malaysia.

Visa is required of those holding Certificate of Identity (more than seven years residence) and Document of Identity (less than seven years residence).

Hong Kong authorities will from July 3 begin issuing passports to 5.5 million permanent residents under the new Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) as it will be known after its return to Chinese sovereignty.

As of June 26, 33 countries have agreed to grant visa-free access to the HKSAR passports. -- BERNAMA

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