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Don't meddle in our affairs, Malaysia tells neighbours

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Malaysia has asked its neighbours not to encourage or support any activity which could lead to rioting or which is aimed at changing the country's present Government or leadership.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today its neighbours should not interfere with Malaysia's internal affairs.

He said Malaysia could understand if its neighbours were sympathetic to the problems the country was facing.

However, they should not go to the extent of giving support to any activity which could be seen as interfering with the country's internal affairs.

These include activities that are against the law, such as those which can provoke rioting, and those aimed at changing the Government and leadership.

"We cannot accept any interference," Abdullah told reporters when asked if Malaysia would seek help from its neighbours since several key supporters of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim have been faxing Press statements purportedly from Manila, Bangkok and Jakarta.

Earlier, he gave a Press conference on Malaysia's success in being elected to the United Nations Security Council.

Yesterday, Saifudin Nasution Ismail, the former Umno Youth assistant secretary who was one of the 10 sacked from the party for participating in anti-Umno activities, had issued a statement with a Bangkok dateline.

The statement was to comment on his expulsion from Umno and to call for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's resignation.

Former Penang Umno Youth chief Abdul Rahim Ghouse and Anwar's former political secretary Mohamad Ezam Mohd Noor who claimed to be in Manila had also issued a joint statement on the same issue.

The two had also previously issued statements purportedly from Manila and Jakarta respectively.

Commenting on these statements, Abdullah said: "What they are doing is unhealthy and stupid. It is the act of cowards and orang bacor (spineless people)."

He said if the supporters wanted change, they should return to the country and talk to the people.

"Whatever problems we are facing, including those related to the leadership, we should let Malaysians decide.

"They should not go abroad to beg for foreigners to help in their cause. Have they no confidence in their own ability to obtain support from the rakyat?" he asked.

Abdullah said Malaysia was a democratic country and the rakyat had the opportunity to choose or change their leaders via casting their votes during elections.

"The people are allowed to campaign. States such as Penang and Sabah had fallen into the hands of the Opposition before. Kelantan is now governed by the Opposition.

"We are always committed to holding elections and the people are given the opportunity to cast their votes in favour of any politician or political party," he said.

Asked about Malaysia's relationship with Indonesia in view of the current political development, Abdullah said it remained good.

"A good relationship is important because whatever is happening in

Indonesia can also affect us.

"Both are members of Asean and other international organisations. As such, it would be mutually beneficial for the two countries to have good co-operation," he said.

On reports that Indonesian President B.J. Habibie has yet to decide whether he would attend next month's Apec Leaders' Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Abdullah said he hoped the leader could make it.

"However, it is up to him to decide. He will consider the importance of regional co-operation in Apec."

On the need for Wisma Putra to intensify efforts to counter negative reports by the foreign media about the political situation in Malaysia, he said this was already being carried out.

A committee has been set up to monitor the situation via Malaysian missions abroad and the Internet.

Wisma Putra has also distributed guidelines to all ambassadors and officials with foreign missions on issues they need to address.

"We have encouraged them to meet leaders of the governments, the private sector and non-governmental organisations in the countries they are serving.

"They have to work hard," Abdullah said.

On the Umno supreme council's decision to abolish the 10 bonus-vote system, Abdullah said it would help curb money politics.

"I have always been against the 10 bonus-vote system as it will only encourage money politics," he said.

Asked why the party had decided to do this only now, Abdullah said Umno had been planning to abolish the system for the past two years.

However, it was delayed due to other priorities.

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