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Abu Bakar-Timor

GET READY FOR EAST TIMOR DEPLOYMENT, ARMED FORCES TOLD

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 13 (Bernama) -- The armed forces has been asked to be prepared for the peacekeeping duties in strife-torn East Timor, Defence Minister Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Mustapha said today.

He said he would inform the Cabinet meeting on Wednesday to obtain the Malaysian government's decision for the participation of the Malaysian soldiers in the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping mission on the island.

"Nevertheless, the armed forces had been asked to make preparations for the peacekeeping job," he said in a statement today.

Abang Abu Bakar said his ministry had not received detailed information on the UN's peacekeeping mandate in the former portuguese colony.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Malaysia is willing to serve in the UN peacekeeping force in East Timor.

He said UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan had asked him whether Malaysia could contribute forces if needed.

"Malaysia said yes. We are quite willing to serve in East Timor and if it is fine with everybody, we will send our troops there," he told reporters after opening the 12th Commonwealth Law Conference here.

After Indonesia said late on Sunday that Indonesia would allow U.N. peacekeeping forces to help it restore order, negotiations had advanced between ASEAN nations and other U.N. members to pave the way for a U.N. force.

However, East Timorese resistance leader Jose Ramos-Horta said after meeting U.S. President Bill Clinton in Auckland today reportedly expressed hoped among other things for an immediate deployment of a "multinational peace restoration" force comprising of forces only from the United States, Australia and New Zealand.

In what appeared to be a snub to the ASEAN countries, he said, peace could be restored by such a force made up from members who have forces readily available.

"Then they can be maybe replaced or phased out in the second stage which is the peacekeeping phase. It is in the peacekeeping phase that you can have contingents from Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and other countries," he was quoted as saying by Western media agencies.

"Several ASEAN countries had expressed their willingness to deploy troops for the UN mission and some have the capability and means to do it in short notice," a Kuala Lumpur-based foreign military analyst said.

As it was, he said, some ASEAN countries including Malaysia had already sent military observers and civilian policemen to the UN Mission in East Timor (UNAMET). Malaysia had sent some 50 personnel so far.

Malaysia, a long-time contributor to UN military missions since the Congo in the 60s, has deployed troops of up to Battalion Group size to peace restoration, peace enforcement and peacekeeping missions throughout the world.

This included missions in Namibia, Cambodia and Somalia in the early 90s where it was involved in fierce firefights with the loss of lives including the Bakara market battle to rescue trapped US soldiers in Mogadishu.

Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in Auckland yesterday had also expressed willingness to deploy Singaporean soldiers to the East Timor UN peacekeeping mission.

Western media reports quoting sources which could not be verified

independently said hundreds of East Timorese are feared to have been killed and tens of thousands made homeless in the rampage by pro-Jakarta militias following the Aug 30 UN-supervised referendum in which the majority of East Timorese voted for independence.

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