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Hamid-Israel

MALAYSIA DENIES SEEKING HELP TO FOSTER TIES WITH ISRAEL

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 7 (Bernama) -- Malaysia today denied a foreign magazine report that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has asked Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid "to help foster closer Malaysian ties with Israel".

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the Prime Minister had never asked for assistance from the Indonesian president or anybody else on the issue.

"Indeed the issue of Malaysia establishing relations with Israel was never raised by the Prime Minister of Malaysia with President Abdurrahman Wahid during the latter's visit to Malaysia from 6 to 7 November 1999.

"Malaysia takes strong objection to the remarks made by the President if the report is true," he told reporters at Wisma Putra here.

He was referring to a report in Far Eastern Economic Review's intelligence column of its Dec 9 issue which said the Prime Minister had asked Abdurrahman "to mediate" and "help foster closer Malaysian ties with Israel".

Syed Hamid reiterated that Malaysia's position towards Israel remained firm and the question of third party intervention did not arise.

"Malaysia will not establish diplomatic or informal relations with Israel until and unless a comprehensive solution to the Middle East problem is achieved," he said.

He said if indeed Abdurrahman had made the statement, then Malaysia took strong objection to it because Malaysia had never at any time said anything to that effect.

He said the ministry had called the Indonesian Charge d'affaires and expressed regret over the report.

The Malaysian ambassador in Jakarta has been told to call upon the Indonesian Foreign Minister to convey Malaysia's stand.

Asked about another statement reportedly made by Abdurrahman that Malaysian leaders spent a lot of time on golf courses, Syed Hamid said the Indonesian president had clarified that his remark was misinterpreted.

Syed Hamid said Abdurrahman told him so when they met in Manila recently.

"I think he has got a right to speak what he thinks is right or wrong but when it involves another country it is our duty to make sure our public is well informed and not misled by any statement made in a foreign country," he said.

Syed Hamid also said the ministry had sent a note to all foreign missions in the country informing them that Malaysia took strong exception to foreign missions providing moral and financial support to local political parties and non-governmental organisations associated with the parties.

"We consider this type of activities as unacceptable and an act of interference in Malaysia's domestic affairs," he said.

-- BERNAMA

NHD YBY