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Malaysia takes strong exception

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Wisma Putra may summon the Indonesian charge d'affaires to Malaysia soon to express the country's displeasure and deep regret over a statement purportedly made by Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid on Malaysia's relations with Israel.

In an interview with the Far Eastern Economic Review, Abdurrahman was quoted as saying Malaysia had sought assistance from him to help foster closer ties with Israel during his visit to Kuala Lumpur last month.

The magazine, in its intelligence column of its Dec 9 issue, also quoted Abdurrahman as saying "they (Malaysia) know we are a friend of Israel".

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said there was no truth in the statement as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had never made such a request to Abdurrahman.

"If it's true that the statement was made by Abdurrahman, we take strong objection to it. We look at this matter very seriously as Dr Mahathir did not at any time say anything to that effect, whether formally or informally."

Speaking to reporters at a Press conference in Wisma Putra, Syed Hamid reiterated that Malaysia's position towards Israel remained firm and very clear, and the question of a third party intervention does not arise.

"Malaysia has no intention of establishing any diplomatic or informal relations with Israel until and unless a comprehensive solution to the Middle East problem is achieved."

Syed Hamid added that Wisma Putra would also request the Malaysian ambassador to Jakarta to call on the Indonesian Foreign Minister to express the same view.

"We have to be sensitive in our relationship between our two countries and we have to be sure the relationship is on proper footing. We believe Malaysia must make its position very clear if something is incorrect or improper."

Syed Hamid said Wisma Putra had reacted to the remark, which was purportedly made by Abdurrahman, as it had implications and impact to the country.

He also said Wisma Putra had sent a note to all foreign embassies and high commissions in the country informing them that Malaysia would take a strong stand on anyone providing moral or financial support to local political parties and non-Governmental organisations associated with the parties.

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