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Australia-East Timor

NO ULTERIOR MOTIVE IN EAST TIMOR, SAYS AUSSIE ENVOY

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 12 (Bernama) -- Australia today defended its role in East Timor against mounting criticisms from Malaysia over Canberra's handling of the situation in the territory, saying it has "no ulterior motive".

"The point I want to get across to the Malaysian audience is that Australia has no ulterior motive in this (East Timor) and that we are very much mandated by the UN," said Australian High Commissioner to Malaysia Robert Cotton.

However, Cotton stressed that Kuala Lumpur-Canberra ties had been "good, deep and positive".

"I would like to think that the relationship is strong enough to manage it (the East Timor issue) through," he said.

Cotton had called for a news conference at the Australian High Commission here to give a briefing on Australia's role in leading the United Nations (UN) multilateral force to restore order in East Timor.

When asked on a Reuters report yesterday quoting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as saying in his monthly column in Japan's "Mainichi Daily" that East Timor would become "Australia's Vietnam", Cotton said: "This operation (in East Timor) is mandated by the UN. The operation in Vietnam was not."

However, he stressed that there had been no setback in relations between Malaysia and Australia despite a barrage of criticisms from leaders of the ruling and opposition parties on certain "thorny" issues, including the East Timor and the so-called "Howard Doctrine".

The "Howard Doctrine", purportedly proposed by Australian Prime Minister John Howard would pave the way for Australia to be a deputy to the United States in Asian peacekeeping.

Howard later denied that there was such a thing as a "Howard Doctrine" and maintained that Australia had not sought any role to be a deputy to the US.

Today, Cotton while reiterating Howard's statement, said: "Australia does not want to have the role of the regional policeman...nor do we see the United States having the role as regional policeman."

"We see that the region needs to work cooperatively together to achieve its purposes. We are a nation which is involved in the region and we believe that we are involved in the region in a proper purpose under the UN mandate," he said.

Cotton said his government had been regularly updating the situation in East Timor to other countries, including Asean member countries namely Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Asked if Australia would welcome a strong Asean presence in East Timor, Cotton, while welcoming it, said it was anticipated that an Asean force would be leading the next phase of peacekeeping operations in East Timor "which would also suit Australia well".

"It is for the United Nations to decide who would lead the next phase," he said.

On bilateral ties, he said Malaysia and Australia had had "differences" in the past but the two countries had managed to work them out.

"We do find a common interest. That doesn't mean that we meet at the same point although we travel at the same road."

"But, we understand that there are points of difference," Cotton added.  
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