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Hamid-Timor

M'SIA WILLING TO LEAD PEACEKEEPING FORCE IN TIMOR

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 7 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is willing to lead the peacekeeping force in East Timor if asked by the United Nations, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today.

"Malaysia has always taken the view that if we are offered an important position... with our background and experience, Malaysia can do so," he said.

Kuala Lumpur, however, did not wish to pre-empt the UN in this matter and would wait for instructions, he told a press conference.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday called on the UN to immediately set up a proper peacekeeping force in East Timor in place of the Australian-led International Force for East Timor (Interfet).

Dr Mahathir said Interfet, which seeks to maintain order in the troubled territory, was formed because the UN decision-making process on the peacekeeping force was slow.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia was of the view that it was important to establish peace in East Timor to regain the confidence of its people.

"That's why we must set up the UN peacekeeping force," he said.

The minister said Malaysia was prepared to play an important role in the force and was in contact with the UN on this matter.

"We are in contact with the UN secretariat in order to determine the form and actual participation when they (peacekeeping force) are ultimately formed," he said.

Malaysia currently has a 30-member complement in Interfet led by a brigadier-general.

An earlier batch of about 60 Malaysian military observers and civilian police was deployed to Unamet (UN Assistance Mission to East Timor) prior to the Aug 30 referendum in which East Timorese voted overwhelmingly for independence from Indonesia.

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