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Ensuring peace for Afghans

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PUTRAJAYA, Fri. - Malaysia and Britain today reaffirmed their commitment to root out terrorism and called for the establishment of a new and accepted administration in Afghanistan for peace and stability there.

"We are certainly committed, 100 per cent committed, to fight terrorism," Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said at a joint Press conference with his visiting British counterpart John Prescott after talks at his office here.

Abdullah said Malaysia hoped that peace and stability would return to Afghanistan to end the suffering of the Afghan people.

"It is important to create a government in Afghanistan that is representative of all the ethnic groups," he said.

Prescott said Britain stood "shoulder to shoulder" with Malaysia in condemning terrorism.

"My Prime Minister Tony Blair has made it clear that we will deal with Afghanistan's administration in allowing the people to choose their administration, develop it and we will help it along," he said, adding that it was now necessary to establish security and to ensure the success of the Bonn talks.

"At the moment the UN is putting together a resolution to see how it can ensure the security of Afghanistan for the Afghans to go about establishing another administration," Prescott said.

Asked if Britain would be agreeable to Taliban spiritual leader Mullah Mohammad Omar's surrendering in return for setting him free, Prescott said it was not clear if there was such a proposition forwarded.

"It is absolutely clear by the UN resolution that action can be taken against the Taliban who refuse to give any assistance to produce al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and, therefore, are actively involved in giving protection and support to Osama.

"And Mullah Omar is one such person that the charge can be made against," he said.

Asked about reports that strikes against Afghanistan may extend to other countries like Yemen, Iraq and Sudan, Prescott said there was a lot of speculation in the Press about that and that no official statement had been made on it.

"We are very clear about our actions in pursuing terrorism and it is endorsed by the UN," he said.

Prescott, who is on his first visit here, said he brought the good wishes of Blair on the constant and good relationship between the two countries and particularly between Dr Mahathir and Blair.

He noted that the relationship between the two countries continued to grow, especially in trade and education.

On environmental issues, Prescott said he had particular interest in it and said he believed as did Blair that if so much effort could be put to root out terrorism perhaps there could be a global alliance to deal with poverty and issues of sustainable development at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg next year.

Also on the environment, Abdullah said they discussed the problems in Malaysia particularly on the issue of water pollution and that he called for stronger commitment by all.

"The developed countries have the technology but if they can share that technology through transfer it can help," he said, adding that they also

discussed issues related to the fight against drugs.

Prescott leaves for Vietnam tomorrow after having had earlier visited the United States, Australia and New Zealand.

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