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Panel to function on pro-active basis

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The joint committee to be set up by the Foreign and Information ministries to counter inaccurate foreign news reports is also aimed at improving the image of Malaysia regionally and internationally.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar today said the committee, to be chaired by the Information Ministry, would function on a pro-active basis instead of merely being reactive each time an inaccurate news report was published or aired.

Action taken to counter such reports would encompass written replies or seeking meetings with the relevant media organisation, said Syed Hamid.

He said although the ministry had been monitoring news reports by the foreign media for some time, the setting up of the committee would enable such monitoring to be more focussed.

Syed Hamid added that the relevant news reports would also be forwarded to the appropriate ministers.

Yesterday, Information Minister Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob announced the setting up of the committee.

At a Press conference at his ministry, Syed Hamid was asked to comment on the jibe against Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in the Feb 5 issue of Time magazine, as reported in a local newspaper today.

He replied that while the Government did not wish the foreign media to praise Malaysian leaders, it did expect fair and accurate reporting.

"Please don't mislead and distort," he said.

Syed Hamid had earlier met with Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammed Saeed Al-Sahaf who called on him with a delegation of four officials.

On his talks with Mohammed Saeed, who began a three-day visit to the country yesterday, Syed Hamid said they were aimed at "improving the substantive relationship between both countries".

To encompass economic co-operation and bilateral relations, the understanding being reached between both countries will see Malaysia looking at selling palm oil to Iraq on a direct purchase basis.

Iraq has also agreed to purchase 5,000 Proton Wira cars.

Malaysia will also continue to provide technical co-operation through training in various sectors, including administration aspects in commercial airlines as well as providing the opportunity to Iraqi pilots to update their skills.

On the United Nations' economic sanctions against Iraq, Syed Hamid said Malaysia would continue with its efforts to see the sanctions being lifted.

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