

31 JULY 2001

Syed Hamid-PAS

PAS IGNORANT ABOUT COUNTRY'S STRATEGIC INTEREST - SYED HAMID

KUALA LUMPUR, July 31 (Bernama) -- Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar today hit out at PAS for criticising a joint military exercise between Malaysia and the United States, saying the party appears to be ignorant about international matters and the country's strategic interest.

He said the exercise was a routine one under a military pact between the two countries and did not affect Malaysia's sovereignty or its position as an Islamic nation.

"Holding a joint military exercise with the US will not result in a Muslim country being no longer Muslim," he told reporters after receiving Yemeni Foreign Minister Dr Abubakr Al-Kirbi at his office.

Syed Hamid was asked to comment on a report in the latest issue of the PAS newsletter 'Harakah' which was critical of the involvement of more than 2,000 US troops in a joint exercise dubbed "Exercise Carat 2001" on July 16-24 covering the shores of Mersing, the Asahan firing range in Melaka and Lumut.

The minister said that apart from the US, Malaysia also conducted military exercises with fellow members of the Five Power Defence Arrangement (Singapore, Australia, New Zealand and Britain) and with other countries with military ties with Malaysia.

He pointed out that Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain too conducted joint exercises with the US and even had American military bases on their soil, but this had not compromised their position as Muslim countries.

Syed Hamid said joint military exercises with the US could help forge a better understanding between the two countries' armed forces and enable Malaysian army personnel to gain new experience in the process.

On the meeting with Dr Abubakr, Syed Hamid said that among the matters discussed were the proposed Malaysia-Yemen Joint Commission, training programme for Yemeni government officials in Malaysia, and efforts to woo Malaysian investors to the West Asian country.

Dr Abubakr, who is on a four-day visit to Malaysia, will also call on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Syed Hamid said Dr Mahathir would make a visit to Yemen on Aug 15-18.

-- BERNAMA

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