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Syed-Australia

"RECALCITRANT HOWARD" SHOULD RETRACT STATEMENT- SYED HAMID

PUTRAJAYA, Dec 7 (Bernama) -- Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today "recalcitrant Australian Prime Minister John Howard" should retract his statement about pursuing terrorist suspects in other countries as this has hurt Australia's neighbours.

Asked if there might be some misunderstanding over his statement, Syed Hamid said: "I think unless he (Howard) speaks different English from us. I think his message was quite clear. He even talked about amending the UN Charter."

The Foreign Minister was speaking to reporters at Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's Hari Raya Aidilfitri open house for dignitaries at Seri Perdana here.

Last Sunday, Howard had said Canberra would not hesitate to launch pre-emptive strikes on suspected terrorist targets in neighbouring countries if the terrorists posed a danger to Australia.

He had also wanted the United Nations Charter to be amended to allow for such strikes.

Southeast Asian leaders, including Dr Mahathir, and the media had expressed outrage and anger over Howard's pre-emptive defence stance.

However on Tuesday, Howard insisted that Australia's relations with its neighbours were not damaged.

Minister of International Trade and Industry Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz felt Australians themselves probably did not like what Howard had said.

She said Malaysia had no problems with the private sector and the Australian people "as this was on a different level."

"We are operating on a different level. No emotion or sensitivities are involved as far as trade and business are concerned. Our problem is only with Howard."

She said many Australians were still visiting and investing in Malaysia.

In July, Deputy Australian High Commissioner to Malaysia Nic Brown said that bilateral trade between Malaysia and Australia was expected to increase to RM16 billion this year.

He said that last year both countries posted a total trade of RM13.742 billion. Malaysia's export to Australia last year amounted to RM7.798 billion while import was RM5.944 billion.

According to the Malaysia-Australia Business Council (MABC) there were 250 Australian companies with investment in Malaysia against 60 Malaysian companies with investment in Australia.

-- BERNAMA

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