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Abdullah: Threat of war between Pakistan and India must be reduced

PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - The threat of war between India and Pakistan should be reduced as soon as possible as the present "high tension" environment is detrimental to the entire region, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

He said the state of tension between the two nuclear neighbours could lead to instability and have an adverse impact on regional economies.

"We do not want to see war or any other action that could lead to continued tension because if such a situation continues, it will affect all of us.

"If people continue to have the perception that a war may break out, it will affect not only the stability but also the economies of the region."

Speaking to the media after receiving Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf's special envoy, Najmuddin Shaikh, at his office here, Abdullah said Kuala Lumpur welcomed Pakistan's stand that the crisis should be solved through discussions.

"The envoy came with a special message from Musharraf to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad," Abdullah said, adding that Najmuddin had also clearly stated Pakistan's readiness to enter into discussion with India to resolve the Kashmir-fuelled crisis.

"Pakistan is ready for discussion with India and at the same time, if that (bilateral discussion) is not possible, then it would like a mutually agreed upon third party to assist in finding a solution," he said, adding that Islamabad categorically stated that it would not start a war.

Musharraf has despatched five envoys, including Najmuddin, to Europe, Asia, the Middle East and the United States to explain Pakistan's position in the crisis.

Asked if Najmuddin had requested Malaysia to play an active role as peacemaker, Abdullah said Pakistan wanted the Malaysian Government and Dr Mahathir in particular, to understand its stand.

"They want Dr Mahathir to speak to the Indian side if it is possible as they are of the view that leaders like Dr Mahathir should call for the easing of tensions," Abdullah said, adding that there was no specific request for Malaysia to mediate.

On Malaysia's stand in the issue, the Deputy Prime Minister stated that Kuala Lumpur was of the view that war was not a solution to disputes.

"Our stand is very clear. We do not support war and are of the view that the crisis must be solved through discussions ... if the need be with the involvement of a third party."

After a meeting with Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar at Wisma Putra, Najmuddin said Pakistan did not have any problem if Malaysia was to play a mediatory role in resolving the conflict.

Although Pakistan and India signed an agreement in 1972 agreeing to resolve the Kashmir issue through bilateral talks, he said not much had been achieved over the past 30 years.

"We have had negotiations but there has been no forward movement. Given this situation, we have advocated right from the start the need to have a third party to help India and Pakistan resolve their problems.

"Pakistan would have absolutely no problem in accepting Malaysia playing the role of mediator."

On the content of Musharraf's letter to Dr Mahathir, Najmuddin said it outlined Pakistan's perspective of the conflict.

Syed Hamid, however, played down the possibility of Malaysia playing a leading role in resolving the conflict.

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