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Abdullah-Australia

MALAYSIA TO CONTINUE POLICY OF FRIENDLINESS WITH ANY COUNTRY

KUALA TERENGGANU, Oct 21 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will continue with its policy of promoting good relations with any country and forging ties based on respect for each other, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

The deputy prime minister said that this had been Malaysia's policy all this while although there were differences of opinion on certain matters.

"Maybe in our relations, there are specific matters that we don't agree on but in other matters we can cooperate.

"This also happens with, for example, the United States...there are things that we don't agree on but there are also things that we can cooperate in," he said after chairing the Terengganu Umno liaison meeting, here.

Abdullah, who is also the Terengganu Umno liaison chairman, said this when asked to comment on Australian Prime Minister John Howard's statement yesterday that he would not go out of his way to improve relations with Malaysia after Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad retires end of this month.

Speaking to reporters in Bangkok where he attended the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) summit, Howard said that after Dr Mahathir's retirement, he did not expect relations between Australia and Malaysia to change dramatically in the short term.

He also welcomed Abdullah as Dr Mahathir's successor, saying that he knew him quite well but he did not expect any dramatic change at the top.

Abdullah said Malaysia could not force Australia to change its stand.

"That's its choice, our policy is to be friendly with any country and to exchange views...if they're good to us, we'll be good to them.

"He (Howard) doesn't understand that what we do and implement is in our interest as an independent and sovereign state," he said.

Asked to comment on a foreign news agency report that US President George W. Bush had pulled Dr Mahathir aside at the Apec summit and told him that his remarks on the Jews was wrong and divisive, Abdullah said he did not know what really transpired.

"Let me get back to (Foreign Minister Datuk Seri) Syed Hamid Albar because the report is based on what was related by Bush's officer," he said.

Yesterday, White House spokesman Scott McClellan was reported to have said that as both leaders attended the Apec meeting, "the president pulled him (Dr Mahathir) aside between meetings and told him that what he said was 'wrong and divisive'".

Abdullah said the US comments were based on reports that had taken Dr Mahathir's speech at the 10th Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit in Putrajaya last week out of context.

"Because they did not look at the whole speech and only quoted one issue from Dr Mahathir's speech, all sorts of criticisms have arisen which should not have in the first place," he said.

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