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Abdullah-SARS

NO PRESSURE IN REVOKING BAN ON VISITORS FROM THREE COUNTRIES - ABDULLAH

KUALA LUMPUR, April 18 (Bernama) -- Acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the government was not under any pressure to revoke the ban on visitors from Canada, Hong Kong and Taiwan following the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

He said the revocation of the ban which was imposed on visitors from these three countries was made as the government was satisfied with the actions taken by these countries to screen and conduct medical examinations on their nationals wishing to leave the country.

In addition, the government had also contacted the Malaysian missions in these countries from time to time to find out the development concerning SARS there, he said at a media conference after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting, here today.

He was responding to a question whether the government's move to revoke the ban on visitors from these three countries after its implementation a week ago had been due to pressure from any party.

Yesterday, Abdullah's office announced the revocation of the ban on visitors from these three countries but maintained the ban on two other countries namely China and Vietnam.

Abdullah, who is also Umno deputy president, said there was also a condition imposed on visitors from these three countries before entering Malaysia, that is, they must undergo health screening before being allowed entry.

"Certainly with the screening it will be more effective (in tackling the spread of the SARS virus)," he said.

Abdullah said the SARS issue was among the topics discussed at the meeting which lasted more than three hours. The meeting was also attended by Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who is on leave.

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir's presence during the first session of the meeting was as an invited guest and the prime minister had presented his views on the SARS as well as the uncertainties in the world scenario at the moment.

In particular, he had spoken on the United States' invasion of Iraq, and the possibility of US attacks on Syria.

Abdullah said the prime minister had also stressed on the need for the country to face the uncertainties in world politics as they could threaten and endanger the country.

Dr Mahathir reminded that the government must be strong and take appropriate measures to tackle the negative effects from the war in Iraq to prevent the situation in the country from becoming worse, said Abdullah.

He said Dr Mahathir also wanted the country's economic strength and solidarity to be maintained.

"It's important that we ensure resilience in the country, in the party's context, Umno must always be strong because the government's leadership today is being held by Barisan Nasional and Umno is an important component of the Barisan (Nasional)," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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