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Malaysia appreciates Brunei's resolve to settle outstanding issues

Saiful Azhar Abdullah

DESCRIBING his three-day visit to Brunei as a success, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi reiterated Malaysia's appreciation of Brunei's resolve to quickly settle the package of issues including the long standing Limbang issue.

Speaking to the Press on the second day of his visit yesterday, Abdullah said he had high regard for the positive attitude of the Brunei Government to end the dispute.

"I regard it as a positive attitude and we hope a positive result will come out of the discussions which will be held later on," he said when asked to comment on views that the positive response from both sides indicated the matter could be settled before Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad retires in October.

"That can be done. Like I told you yesterday, we would have liked to have solved it yesterday but it was not possible as there were complications ... anyway both sides are keen to resolve the issues quickly".

The sign of the issues being settled amicably emerged on Monday when Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah told Abdullah during a 15-minute meeting at Istana Nurul Iman that the senior officials of both Governments would begin negotiations within the next few weeks to resolve dispute linked to overlapping claims on Limbang involving territory and maritime borders and the Exclusive Economic Zone.

The officials will decide within this week on the date and venue of the meeting.

Although Malaysian officials declined to reveal the date, news reports here said the proposed date was July 22.

The discussion will come in a package which means it will not focus on the Limbang issue alone.

Malaysian officials declined to divulge details of the package but it was indicated that a "win-win" solution had been offered by Malaysia to settle the dispute amicably and it resulted in speculation that it would be overcome, at most, within the next two months.

Asked whether a solution had been reached on the dispute over the oilfield off the coast of Sabah, Abdullah said it would be worked out by the officials at the meeting.

However, reports emerged that Malaysia offered to solve the issue by having a joint development area.

Abdullah said his meeting with the Sultan of Brunei was fruitful and the latter wanted bilateral ties to be taken to a higher level.

Yesterday, Abdullah attended a briefing on Brunei Economic Development Board's economic strategy at the International Convention Centre.

Abdullah's visit ends today. He and his wife Datuk Seri Endon Mahmood leave for Manila enroute to Tokyo this morning.