

11/01/2003

Straw: Britain will not jeopardise relations with Kuala Lumpur

PUTRAJAYA, Fri. - Britain said today that it has no agenda to prevent its nationals from travelling to Malaysia and does not intend to jeopardise its strong bilateral ties with Kuala Lumpur.

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw has also given an undertaking that an earlier travel advisory which caused some discomfort to Malaysians would be re-worded to prevent any misunderstanding.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said he made it very clear to his British counterpart during their meeting today that Malaysia did not like to be depicted as an unsafe country for travel in the light of the travel advisories.

"We know that the British tourists and investors preferred to come to Malaysia and as such we do not want anything vague to jeopardise that," Syed Hamid said.

Syed Hamid said Straw had given the assurance that the wording of travel advisories would be looked into to address Malaysia's concerns over the impact of such documents on the country's tourism industry.

He said Straw had told him that Britain had no specific travel alert telling its citizens not to visit Malaysia and that the earlier advisories were meant to remind British citizens to take extra precautions when travelling abroad, especially when going to public places.

Several foreign governments including the United States, Australia and Britain have issued travel alerts advising their citizens to avoid this region in the wake of the deadly Bali bombings in October last year.

Malaysia has also expressed its concerns on the top-up fees being suggested for local students in Britain as there were fears among Malaysians studying there that it might eventually apply to them.

Malaysia has some 11,000 students in British varsities.

Syed Hamid said he also expressed Malaysia's view on the need to allow the multilateral process in the form of the work by United Nations (UN) weapons inspectors to take its course before any decision to attack Iraq was made.

Straw, he said, informed him that Britain was of the view that Iraq must comply with UN Security Council resolutions and that it would wait for the report of the inspectors before taking further action, and that war was not inevitable if there was full compliance.

Syed Hamid said Straw shared Malaysia's views on the importance of a multilateral process.

Meanwhile, speaking at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport before departing for home, the Foreign Secretary who held separate meetings with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said he concurred with Dr Mahathir's contention that the root causes of terrorism must be eliminated in the Middle East before there could be an end to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

"We jointly recognise that the underlying causes must be identified and eliminated before justice could be served to both the Palestinians and the Israelis," he said, adding that Britain was committed towards ensuring a peaceful co-existence of the two warring sides.

Straw said that apart from the issue of Iraq, Palestine and the war against terror, he also discussed wide ranging bilateral issues with both Dr Mahathir and Abdullah.