

Pak Lah urges against Sudan sanctions
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Malaysia, a key trading partner of Sudan, has urged western nations not to impose sanctions on the country over its failure to resolve the conflict in Darfur.

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi issued the call during a three-day visit to Sudan, arguing sanctions would hurt the African state's population, Bernama agency reported from Khartoum.

"What they should do is to engage in talks," he was quoted as saying late Monday after meeting with Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir.

Malaysia is the current chair of the 57-nation Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which counts Sudan among its members, and Abdullah said the body would support any initiatives towards peace.

The New Straits Times newspaper said al-Bashir, after the talks with Abdullah, called on the OIC to help Sudan "confront western pressure to accept international forces in Darfur."

At least 200,000 people have been died as a result of four years of ethnic strife in Darfur and more than two million driven from their homes, according to the United Nations. Khartoum disputes those figures.

The United States has held off on a decision to impose unilateral sanctions against Sudan to give the UN a chance to convince Khartoum to allow UN peacekeepers into Darfur.

Negative perception

But Abdullah said al-Bashir had told him the situation in Darfur was exaggerated by media reports, and that he had advised the Africa leader to highlight his successes.

"If not, even if there is success, there will always be a negative perception of the situation there," he was quoted as saying in the Star daily.

The prime minister also said there were plans to expand trade and investment links with Sudan.

Malaysia's total trade with Sudan was 51.9 million dollars last year, with exports valued at 51.7 million dollars, Abdullah said.

The New Straits Times said Malaysia is the second largest investor in Sudan after China, with Malaysia's state oil firm Petronas pumping in five billion ringgit into the African nation.

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