

Abdullah visits Darfur to review needs of refugees

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LEE SIEW LIAN

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday paid a surprise visit to Darfur, flying in for a 2½-hour tour of the northern town of Al-Fashir and a refugee camp outside it.

Following a drive through the Al-Salam camp for displaced villagers who fled earlier conflicts elsewhere, Abdullah concluded that refugees was Darfur's most pressing problem.

"I feel strongly what is needed is a major concerted effort by countries friendly to Sudan and the OIC to overcome their (refugees) suffering."

Abdullah, who is chairman of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, said he would approach OIC member countries and the Islamic Development Bank to secure help for Sudan's government in this area.

Government officials said Abdullah wanted to assess the conditions in Darfur for himself to decide what kind of help Malaysia and the OIC could offer Sudan.

This, in turn, was seen as a mark of his confidence in the ability of Sudanese President Omer Hassan Ahmed Al-Bashir to bring development to the country.



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (right), accompanied by Sudanese Minister of Energy and Mining Awad Ahmed Al-Jaz (second from right), waving at villagers who welcomed them with traditional dances upon their arrival at the Al-Fashir district in Darfur yesterday. — Bernama picture

Malaysia is the second largest investor in Sudan after China.

"(Omer's) government is committed to the Darfur peace agreement," Abdullah said.

About 2,000 displaced villagers live in the Al-Salam camp, in huts

built from mud bricks and thatched with straw.

He said the displaced villagers needed to be reassured that it was safe to return to their villages, and that there would be schools, medical services and water supply.

"I'm sure this will give them a strong incentive to return," he said after his tour.

Yesterday was the final day of his three-day visit to Sudan, and he flew off to Kenya for a two-day official visit.