

## **Putrajaya urged to keep out of Arab row**

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**By Sheith Khidhir Bin Abu Bakar**

**Treat whatever happens in the Middle East as a Mideast affair, says an academic.**

PETALING JAYA: A frequent critic of the government has voiced support for Putrajaya's decision to adopt a wait-and-see attitude before committing itself to any side of the diplomatic conflict between Qatar and several other Arab countries.

"Putrajaya should consider whatever happens in the Middle East as a Middle East event," said Mohamed Ghouse Nasuruddin, a lecturer at Universiti Sains Malaysia who often comments on government policies in letters to the press.

He was referring to Monday's decision by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates to cut diplomatic ties with Qatar, which they accused of supporting terrorist organisations.

There has been debate on whether Malaysia should follow suit and cut at least some ties with Qatar.

Ghouse said Malaysia was not diplomatically bound by the actions of any of the countries involved in the row.

"The Middle Eastern countries have their own vested interests and there's no pressure for us to follow any one of them," he told FMT. "It's better to stand back and see how things unravel."

On Monday, Bernama quoted Prime Minister Najib Razak as saying, "We are close to the Gulf countries. We don't know what the issues are at the moment. We will watch the developments."

Last February, Malaysia's ambassador to Qatar, Ahmad Jazri Mohd Johar, told the press that trade between Qatar and Malaysia had increased three-fold to US\$842.38 million in the 10 years since 2006.

The state-owned Qatar Investment Authority is the main investor in Pavilion KL shopping mall. It also invests in other real estate projects in and around Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC).

Ahmad Jazri has also been quoted as saying that many Qataris considered Malaysia a family-friendly holiday destination.

Ghouse said there was no reason for Malaysia to jeopardise these “huge investments” by “jumping the gun” over the Qatar situation.

“If we cut ties straight away, then we might have to do damage control later, and that will not be good for our economy and our international standing,” he said.

“In the event that we do cut ties, of course we’ll be cutting out some of our revenue-generating economic activities. It’ll take a lot of time to reset those things. At this juncture, we can’t afford anything like that.

“We are groping around trying to fix our image, economy and currency. So, from my perspective, we have to weigh the pros and cons.”

\* Afiqah Farieza Abdul Aziz contributed to this report.

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