



DEEP IN CONVERSATION: Abdullah explaining a matter to Commonwealth Association of Planners president Prof Cliff Hage with Ong beside them in Putrajaya yesterday. — STARpic by RAJA FAISAL HISHAN

Foreign policy to stay non-aligned

BY MERGAWATI ZULFAKAR

PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia will continue to maintain an independent and non-aligned foreign policy in safeguarding national interest in the face of globalisation, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

"Malaysia must continue to advocate that the process of globalisation should include the prospering and empowerment of the developing countries," he said.

"As current chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement and Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), it is in fact a duty for Malaysia to take a fresh lead in this critical issue," he said when opening the week-long Malaysian heads of mission conference at the Putrajaya Convention Centre here yesterday.

He reminded Malaysian diplomats that as heads of mission, they should

establish ways to gather quality information, be competent in discussing difficult issues with their foreign counterparts and make sound recommendations to the Government.

"You should sharpen your negotiating skills so as to match the best of the best in the craft of diplomacy," he added.

At a press conference later, Abdullah said budget and human resource constraints at embassies were discussed.

He said missions which had budget problems would find it difficult to carry out their tasks.

"I am not saying that we do not have money at all but we need to better manage the country's finances because it is still in deficit. However, for the ones which are really necessary, the Government is willing to spend money," he added.

On the new Iraqi interim government, Abdullah said it must ensure that the

nation was free from violence before any other country could consider sending troops there.

"It is important to achieve peace and stability to pave the way for their elections in January," he said.

Abdullah said that OIC members had not given any indication they would join the multinational force in Iraq.

"Our view is that we would like to encourage countries that can afford to do so, especially those around the region," he added.

In his speech, Abdullah had reiterated Malaysia's stand that the United Nations had an important role to play in the transition to full sovereignty in Iraq as well as its reconstruction.

Malaysia hoped the new government in Iraq would find it expedient to involve the United Nations in ways appropriate and beneficial for the country, he said.

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