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Mahathir-Suharto

MAHATHIR-SUHARTO TALKS TO FOCUS ON BUILDING BILATERAL TIES

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 5 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad indicated today that he will not raise the territorial dispute over Sipadan and Ligitan islands during his talks with Indonesian President Suharto, who arrives here tomorrow for a two-day visit.

"That matter has been decided," he told reporters after opening Gerakan's 25th delegates conference at the party headquarters here.

Instead, Dr Mahathir said, their talks on Monday would concentrate on how the two countries could establish good relations, including economically, and their stand in Asean and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec).

Reports from Jakarta had quoted Indonesia's Armed Forces chief Gen Feisal Tanjung as saying recently that Dr Mahathir and Suharto would discuss the issue during the Indonesian president's trip to Malaysia.

The two small islands, located on the border of Sabah and East Kalimantan, are being claimed by Malaysia and Indonesia.

Kuala Lumpur has suggested taking the case to the International Court of Justice in The Hague. However, Indonesia's Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, who will accompany Suharto during his trip here, was quoted as saying that Jakarta would agree to the suggestion only if bilateral talks on the matter failed.

Asked if he would discuss Indonesian workers in Malaysia with Suharto, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't think we should go into that. That is being dealt with already."

It is estimated that there are about 1.5 million Indonesian workers in Malaysia.

It was reported recently that Indonesia is studying the possibility of bringing home by naval ships about 5,000 illegal Indonesian workers who are currently being detained at several detention camps in Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir last met Suharto in Bogor, Indonesia, after attending the Apec summit in November 1994 while the Indonesian president's last visit to Malaysia was in 1993. -- BERNAMA

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