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Suharto needs to rest: Alatas

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INDONESIAN Foreign Minister Ali Alatas conveyed the regrets of President Suharto to Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed for being unable to attend the second Asean Informal Summit which began yesterday.

"In fact he (President Suharto) is recuperating from the trips he made to South Africa, Vancouver and Saudi Arabia.

"Doctors told him not to go on strenuous journeys both in and out of the country.

"So it was with deep regret that he had to decide not to come to the summit meeting. In fact, everything was prepared for him to come and he knew it was an important summit which also coincides with the 30th anniversary of Asean," he told reporters after holding bilateral talks with Malaysia.

On Indonesia's agenda for the summit, Alatas said that while Indonesia had no specific items to propose, President Suharto - had he been here - would have "participated actively in all the issues to be raised including with heads of governments of the three East Asian countries".

He added that Indonesia may propose for greater cooperation among Asean countries especially "at these times when all of us are facing difficult times, financially".

On the outlook of the Indonesian economy, he said the economy "is still being battered as far as the currency is concerned but it is much more a question of psychological thing rather than economic and we hope that it would soon straighten out and hope that it would improve very soon".

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