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Alatas-Visit

ALATAS DENIES SPECULATIONS OVER HABIBIE'S CANCELLED VISIT

JAKARTA, Oct 8 (Bernama) -- Foreign Minister Ali Alatas today denied speculations that President B.J. Habibie cancelled his planned visit to Kuala Lumpur due to political developments in Malaysia.

"I want to make it clear that the cancellation has nothing to do with the developments in Malaysia after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad sacked Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister," he told reporters after meeting Habibie at the Merdeka Palace, here.

Habibie was scheduled to make a one-day visit to Malaysia in the middle of this month to discuss bilateral matters and other issues with Dr Mahathir.

State Secretary Akbar Tanjung announced two days ago that Habibie had cancelled the visit owing to tight state duties requiring him to remain in the country in the next few months.

Alatas reaffirmed the reasons behind the cancellation of the visit.

He said it would be difficult for the president to make an overseas trip when there is no vice-president to take over state duties in his absence.

"This is the reason why Habibie did not attend last month's Non-Aligned Movement Summit in South Africa and the recent cancellation of his visit to Malaysia," he said.

However, no decision has been made on whether Habibie would attend next month's APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation) Leaders' Summit in Kuala Lumpur and the Asean Summit in Hanoi, Vietnam.

"If the president decides not to attend the APEC or the Asean summit, it is due to his tight schedules at home preventing him from leaving the country and not because of other speculative and hypothetical reasons," he said.

Alatas said bilateral relations between Malaysia and Indonesia remained good and had not been affected by recent political developments in Malaysia.

On Habibie's meeting with Philippine President Joseph Estrada on Batam island next Tuesday, Alatas said it was held at the request of Estrada.

He said Estrada, who would attend the World Economic Forum in Singapore on Oct 13 and 14, had requested for a meeting with Habibie.

As this would be the first meeting between the two new presidents, they might exchange views on strengthening bilateral ties and developments in the Asean region, he added.

-- BERNAMA
ABU TS