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Dr Mahathir and Habibie sort out several bilateral issues

Ravi Nambiar in Batam, Indonesia

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and President B.J. Habibie of Indonesia said their meeting here has enabled them to clear a few bilateral issues on trade and logging activities.

"Other than that, this meeting is really meant to keep us close together and up-to-date on each other's problems and how we resolve these problems.

"It is also to encourage co-operation in the fields of economics, culture and politics," Dr Mahathir said at a joint Press conference with Habibie at the Nongsa Point Marina Resort after their closed-door meeting yesterday.

He said the bilateral issues discussed involved logging and trade and border crossings by nationals of both countries at their respective borders.

The talks had helped to "clear up" the issues, he said, and added:

"We decided on ways and means of ensuring that this thing does not happen to the detriment of both countries."

Both leaders also said the meeting had enabled them to better understand the economic and political problems affecting the two countries.

They also said the actual situation in both countries was not as bad as reported by the foreign media.

"As a result of this meeting, we were able to know about what is happening in each other's country and it is very different from media reports," Dr Mahathir said.

Habibie said he was grateful to Dr Mahathir for making the visit to Batam, adding that he was honoured to personally receive the Prime Minister and exchange views on regional and bilateral matters.

"I am very happy to meet Dr Mahathir and to know that he is in good health. This is the most important thing," he said, referring to Dr Mahathir's recent hospitalisation in Kuala Lumpur for an acute lung infection.

Habibie and the First Lady Hasri Ainun earlier accorded a traditional welcome to Dr Mahathir and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali when they arrived at the Hang Nadim Batam Airport for a half-day working visit.

Habibie embraced Dr Mahathir and exchanged greetings on his arrival from the Senai Airport in Johor on board an army helicopter.

Also in the Prime Minister's delegation was Foreign Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar and International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz.

Besides the President, other top Indonesian leaders present included Economics, Finance and Industry Minister Ginandjar Kartasasmita, Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, Armed Forces Chief General Wiranto, Industry and Trade Minister Rahadi Ramelan and State Secretary Muladi.

This is Habibie's second meeting with Dr Mahathir as President of Indonesia. They last met in Kuala Lumpur during the Apec Ministerial meeting.

On the Indonesian presidential election, Dr Mahathir hoped Indonesians would choose a Government that would continue to spur growth and development in the country.

"I am personally confident that the polls would be conducted well and that the people of Indonesia, with their strong sense of nationalism, would choose a Government that would bring them much benefit.

"I am also confident that Indonesians who love their country would not

forget their responsibility."

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