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Indonesia-Malaysia

INDONESIA DENIES FEER REPORT ON MALAYSIA-ISRAEL TIES

By: Openg Onn

JAKARTA, Dec 9 (Bernama) -- Indonesia has denied a Hong Kong-based magazine report quoting President Abdurrahman Wahid as saying Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had sought Abdurrahman's help to establish closer ties between Malaysia and Israel.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Alwi Shihab described the Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER) report in its Dec 9 issue as "baseless".

The FEER, in its intelligence column, quoted Abdurrahman as saying he was asked by Dr Mahathir "to help establish closer relations between Malaysia and Israel".

Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar had denied the FEER report two days ago.

"I was present in the meeting between Dr Mahathir and Gus Dur (as Abdurrahman is fondly known) in Malaysia early last month and nothing on Israel was mentioned," Alwi said here today.

"I also accompanied Gus Dur on his other overseas trips and I have never heard the president giving such a statement."

He said in the meeting, Abdurrahman and Dr Mahathir have mutual respect for each other and as such, the Indonesian president was unlikely to make a statement to tarnish the good name of the Malaysian Prime Minister.

Alwi said Abdurrahman believed he had never given such a statement.

"Did the FEER journalist misreport or was it done on purpose or that someone had a certain motive?" he asked.

He said Indonesia and Malaysia have close ties which no one could undermine.

Alwi said his officials had met the Malaysian Ambassador here Datuk Rastam Mohamed Isa yesterday to clarify the matter.

Asked if Indonesia would take action against FEER, he said: "if they have a representative here, I could talk to them."

-- BERNAMA

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