

19 MAY 1999

Malaysia-Indonesia

MAHATHIR AND HABIBIE HOLD BILATERAL TALKS TOMORROW

By: Tham Choy Lin

BATAM, May 19 (Bernama) -- Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir and Indonesian President B.J.Habibie arrive here tomorrow for a bilateral meeting, their second since the latter took over as head of state a year ago.

Habibie will be accompanied by several top ranking ministers but little light has been shed on the meeting that was requested by Jakarta with less than three weeks to the country's crucial first multi-party national election.

Indonesian Justice Minister Muladi, who recently assumed the duties of the state secretary, said last week that the two leaders would discuss bilateral and regional issues but offered no further details.

Officials said the talks, expected to last about two hours, would be wide-ranging covering political, economic, security, cultural and social issues.

Dr Mahathir and Habibie would have a four-eye meeting first before holding delegation-level talks. They last met in November on the sidelines of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) summit in Malaysia.

In the Malaysian delegation here will be Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Home Affairs Ministry Secretary-General Datuk Mohamed Noor Abdul Rahim and senior officials of several government agencies.

The high-profile Indonesian side will include Muladi, Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, Defence Minister General Wiranto, Coordinating Minister for Economy, Finance and Trade Ginandjar Kartasasmita and Industry Minister Rahadi Ramelan.

The idyllic Nongsa Point Marina resort, the venue of the meeting, was under a tight security cordon.

Dr Mahathir will return to Malaysia after lunch to begin a two-day visit to Johor.

Habibie has been named as the ruling Golkar party's sole presidential candidate and reportedly favours Wiranto as his running mate.

A total of 48 political parties are participating in the June 7 polls that will be a test of the reforms carried out by Habibie after the downfall of his mentor, Suharto, last May.

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