

26/08/1999

Malaysia and Indonesia agree to strengthen bilateral ties

Ramlan Said; Anis Kamil

PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - Continuing their dialogue after their first meeting in Batam, Indonesia, in May, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Indonesian President B.J. Habibie today reached further agreement on improving bilateral relations.

One of these was to work out a more orderly entry of Indonesian workers into the country, the Prime Minister said, adding that this would also involve skilled workers.

Speaking at a joint Press conference after a two-hour meeting at the Prime Minister's Department here, Dr Mahathir and Habibie affirmed that relations between the two countries had been strengthened in the areas of technology, culture and the economy.

Habibie arrived at 9am at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport for a short working visit. Soon after arrival, Habibie was granted an audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong at Istana Negara.

He later had lunch with Dr Mahathir at the Palace of the Golden Horses.

After their four-eyed meeting, the two leaders were joined by several ministers for more discussions on bilateral matters. Malaysian ministers in the talk included First Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Defence Minister Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Mustapha and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali.

The Indonesian delegation comprised five ministers - Ginandjar Kartasasmita (Economy, Finance and Industry), Ali Alatas (Foreign), Armed Forces chief Tan Sri Jeneral Wiranto (Defence and Security), Rahardi Ramelan (Trade and Industry) and Muladi (Justice).

The leaders fielded many questions from a big Press corp, which also comprised Indonesian journalists accompanying the President.

Dr Mahathir said the talks reached general agreement on several matters raised while Habibie said the talks were aimed at improving co-operation. He said the talks were "efficient and good".

Dr Mahathir was even asked by an Indonesian journalist when he was going to call the general election.

To this, the Prime Minister replied that he had yet to decide on the matter.

When the journalist alluded to earlier rumours that Dr Mahathir would announce the dissolution of Parliament after his recent visit to China, Dr Mahathir said:

"This is speculation ... everyone has the right to speculate ... like when I came back from China there should be an election because Tun Razak (Malaysia's second Prime Minister) came back from China and called the election."

On whether the meeting touched on claims that government documents were purportedly stashed overseas by sacked Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Dr Mahathir said this was not raised.

"This is Malaysia's internal affair. We do not discuss each other's domestic affairs," he said.

To a question from another Indonesian journalist on whether it was true that Malaysia was harbouring members of the Free Aceh Movement, Dr Mahathir said the Government did not support the movement although there were Acehnese refugees in the country.

"We do not support or give them the freedom to do things detrimental to Indonesia.

"Malaysia does not support any attempt to secede parts of any country because if we do so, others might also do the same thing to us later."

When a foreign journalist asked Habibie to explain whether the presence of Indonesian Armed Forces chief Jen Wiranto was connected to the Aceh issue, the president said this was not unusual because of Wiranto's position.

To a question by another foreign wire service correspondent on his current stand on Anwar who is serving a six-year jail term after being found guilty of corruption, Habibie said the matter should be left to be resolved according to Malaysia's own procedures.

"I have nothing to say. I don't know the facts of case ... I have so much to do in my country and I came here for the purpose of strengthening relations."

Habibie left for Jakarta at 7.30pm.