

'Asean states must adhere to 10 non-interference policy'

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JAKARTA, Mon: Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid urged fellow Asean members to adhere to the organisation's policy of non-interference and vowed to stay out of the row over the jailing of Malaysian ex-deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim, a report said today.

Abdurrahman told the inaugural People's Assembly of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean) on Indonesia's Batam island last Saturday that despite his friendship with former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim he had promised Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad not to interfere in the country's affairs.

"So when Anwar's wife came to Jakarta and requested breakfast with me, I did that but afterwards I told the Malaysian ambassador that the breakfast was impossible for me to avoid but I would not take any action to interfere," he was quoted as saying in the Jakarta Post.

"Sometimes we can aid our friends, but sometimes we have to bear with the situation."

Anwar is in jail after being convicted of abuse of power and sodomy. Abdurrahman implored some 300 Asean representatives at the three-

day gathering to remember that progress, or let's say reconciliation, in one part of Asean cannot be executed in another part."

He said it was important for Asean members to know that the policy of non-interference should be followed "because we have to understand the position in other societies."

Asean groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Abdurrahman said that as a democratic man he had sympathy for human rights advocates, then added: "It's a long way to have a truly democratic society," citing a Chinese proverb, saying: "A journey of a thousand paces begins with one step."

Abdurrahman had breakfast with Dr Mahathir on Saturday morning in Singapore during the two-day Asean leaders' summit, after which he said Dr Mahathir had a "new friend" in confronting Singapore as he launched a scathing attack on the island state.

"Before only Dr Mahathir was brave enough to confront Singapore, but now Mahathir has a new friend," the Post quoted him as saying. Reuters