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Hamid-Indonesia

ABDURRAHMAN WAHID INVITES DR MAHATHIR TO VISIT INDONESIA

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 21 (Bernama) -- President Abdurrahman Wahid has officially invited Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to visit Indonesia as a follow-up to their brief meeting at the Unctad X conference in Bangkok earlier this month.

Visiting Indonesian Foreign Minister Alwi Shihab himself handed over the invitation to Dr Mahathir at the Prime Minister's Department in Putrajaya later today.

Disclosing this at a joint press conference after receiving Alwi at his office, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said: "This is an unusual procedure because the Foreign Minister himself is sending the invitation.

"It's obviously an indication of the closeness of the two countries in all aspects and dimensions."

Alwi said it was time to renew intimacy between the two countries and their leaders and that "we have been longing for Dr Mahathir's visit for a long time".

Alwi said it was indeed a departure from the normal practice of extending such an invitation through the usual diplomatic channels and this exemplified president Abdurrahman's high regard for Dr Mahathir.

Indonesia was hopeful that Dr Mahathir's upcoming visit would enable him make a first hand appraisal of the assistance that the republic needed to accelerate economic recovery, Alwi said.

It would also serve as a follow up to Abdurrahman's visit to Malaysia last November, about a fortnight upon being elected Indonesia's fourth president, he said.

Alwi said Indonesia appreciated Dr Mahathir's preoccupation with the Malaysia's general election last November and looked upon the prime minister's upcoming visit as more significant now that Dr Mahathir had secured a fresh mandate from the people.

Alwi said Malaysia had never abandoned Indonesia in times of crisis and the republic would want to learn from its neighbour on overcoming the economic crisis.

"Indonesia looks upon Dr Mahathir's leadership as something to be emulated. He is genuinely concerned about the people and about developing the country without having to adopt conventional ways," said Alwi.

Syed Hamid said Dr Mahathir had informed Wisma Putra to arrange for him to visit Indonesia as soon as possible.

"It's a normal visit but is more important now because of the current development. We are out of the economic crisis and they are moving towards that," he said.

To a question, Syed Hamid said that during the 45-minute meeting with Alwi, the Aceh issue was not discussed and added that it was an Indonesian problem.

-- BERNAMA

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