

23/02/2000

Dr M accepts Indon invitation

Patvinder Singh

PETALING JAYA, Tues - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has accepted Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid's invitation to visit Indonesia as a follow-up to their brief meeting at the Unctad X conference in Bangkok earlier this month.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today the Prime Minister had said that he would make the visit as soon as possible.

"Dr Mahathir would like to include people from the private sector in his entourage to see how we can assist Indonesia's economic recovery and what the opportunities are," he said after opening The International Symposium on Malaysian Business in the New Era at a hotel here.

He said a fact-finding team would also be sent to Indonesia before Dr Mahathir's visit to identify areas that needed assistance.

"I have been instructed by the Prime Minister to make arrangements for this."

He said it was necessary to identify what needed to be done in terms of financial assistance and investment.

Syed Hamid said Indonesian Foreign Minister Alwi Shihab had indicated he would be glad to receive the team.

Alwi handed the invitation to Dr Mahathir at the Prime Minister's Department in Putrajaya yesterday.

"The most important thing is, we are going to create a partnership and not taking advantage of the situation. It must be mutually beneficial," he said.

He said proposals would be submitted to Dr Mahathir to make the visit a focused one.

Malaysia, he said, had always been positive about providing financial assistance.

Syed Hamid said the fact that the invitation was personally delivered by Alwi was a clear indication that Indonesia placed Malaysia in a special position.

"This shows the good rapport between Indonesia and Malaysia. Bilaterally we are very close, and regionally we are founder members of Asean," he said.

He added that he had discussed with Alwi areas in which Indonesia wanted Malaysia's involvement.

Syed Hamid said there was a need to set up a "confidence-building process within the region" to help Indonesia overcome its economic problems.

"So much needs to be done and if more Asean countries get involved, it would be better for the grouping," he said.

"We must not only depend on assistance or investment from outside the region, but must show we have confidence in each other. This will help attract other countries to invest in the region," Syed Hamid added.

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