

17 OCT 2000

Mahathir-Asem

DR MAHATHIR CONFIRMS HE IS ATTENDING ASEM

LANGKAWI, Oct 17 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he will be attending the Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem) in Seoul this week.

He confirmed this at a joint press conference with visiting Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid at the Sheraton Perdana Hotel here today.

Asked to comment on speculation that he was skipping the meeting, Dr Mahathir said: "That was only a rumour...Yes I'm attending."

Asked whether he and Abdurrahman discussed Asem at their meeting here earlier, Dr Mahathir said they did not.

The Indonesian president arrived here this afternoon for informal talks with Dr Mahathir to further enhance Indonesia-Malaysia ties.

The 3rd Asem started yesterday and will end on Monday.

On his talks with Abdurrahman, Dr Mahathir said they had a very good discussion covering a number of areas.

"We found that there is no disagreement on our part. We discussed about the Indonesian workers here and how we should formalise this thing," he said.

He said the two countries also discussed possible cooperation in promoting Indonesia's Batam Island as an Asean city.

Malaysia and Indonesia also agreed to continue cooperation in oil and gas exploration and production.

Dr Mahathir and Abdurrahman led their respective delegations to the bilateral talks lasting almost an hour.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar and his Indonesian counterpart Alwi Shihab also attended the talks.

Abdurrahman said Indonesia wanted to learn more about the free trade zones opened in Langkawi and Labuan.

On the proposed deployment of a United Nations mission to West Timor, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia understood Indonesia's concern over its sovereignty regarding the matter.

The prime minister said Indonesia itself would resolve the issue and he believed that the republic had made some decisions relating to it which would not impinge on its sovereignty.

Today's meeting between Dr Mahathir and Abdurrahman followed an understanding between them to hold informal discussions every six months to strengthen bilateral ties.

They last met in Jakarta in March.

"I think that this discussion has proven very useful and we will continue to discuss when we meet every year in each other's country so that relationship between Malaysia and Indonesia will continue to be productive and profitable for both countries," said Dr Mahathir.

Tonight, the prime minister hosted a dinner for the Indonesian leader and his delegation at the hotel.

Abdurrahman, who is accompanied by wife Sinta Nuriyah, is scheduled to leave for Hong Kong tomorrow enroute to Seoul for the Asem.

-- BERNAMA

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