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Asean-Indonesia

GUS DUR WANTS NEW WEST PACIFIC FORUM, SAYS SINGAPORE NEWSPAPER

SINGAPORE, Nov 26 (Bernama) -- Indonesia's President Abdurrahman Wahid has proposed a new West Pacific grouping to include East Timor and Papua New Guinea after his call to bring the two countries under Asean was reportedly rejected, said Singapore's Sunday Times newspaper.

"Indonesia realises that the existing relations with Asean is not enough. We should not only have one model which is Asean. We should look for other models," he was quoted as saying while speaking the Indonesian community at a closed door meeting here yesterday.

Calling the proposed grouping the West Pacific Forum, Abdurrahman said it could include Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines if they wished.

The Indonesian leader was here to attend the fourth Asean informal summit. Indonesia is among the founding members of Asean, in short for the Association of South East Asian Nations, in 1967.

The Sunday Times said according to transcripts of the meeting, Abdurrahman was disappointed that Asean as well as Singapore had not supported Jakarta's idea of bringing in East Timor and Papua New Guinea.

"Two days ago, I met Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew and I asked him to consider admitting East Timor and Papua New Guinea into Asean as members. He said that they will become a burden for Asean.

"If Lee Kuan Yew says 'no', then the rest will say 'no'," Abdurrahman was quoted as saying.

Abdurrahman also criticised Singapore's Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, saying the latter did not mention Indonesia in regional trade fairs and that Goh also did not pay enough attention to Asean countries south of Singapore.

"Goh can go his own way and we can also go our own way. I don't think it will be a problem for us if Singapore gets angry by the fact that we are going to set up new ties with others.

"When Singapore sets up a defence pact with Australia and New Zealand, they did not tell us anything. They also did not tell Indonesia and Malaysia that they would service US navy ships," he said.

Abdurrahman also said that for a long while, only Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was critical of Singapore but "now, Mahathir has a new friend to join him".

-- BERNAMA

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