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Mahathir-Gusmao

GUSMAO'S VISIT PAVING WAY FOR WARM KL-DILI TIES

PUTRAJAYA, Feb 8 (Bernama) -- Malaysia and East Timor look set for warm bilateral ties in the years ahead following East Timorese leader Xanana Gusmao's official visit here, said Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

Today's meeting between Gusmao and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has widened avenues for Kuala Lumpur and Dili to establish bilateral ties, he said.

Gusmao's visit has brought about greater understanding of Malaysia by the East Timorese leader, Syed Hamid said when briefing reporters on the outcome of the 40-minute meeting at the Prime Minister's Office here.

"The important thing today is that we no longer take them (East Timor leaders) as not understanding Malaysia well," Syed Hamid said.

He was asked whether Gusmao's visit enabled Malaysia to explain its stand and role towards East Timor.

The question was in light of Gusmao's earlier expressed perception of Malaysia's pro-Jakarta stance after East Timor voted for independence from Indonesia in last August's referendum.

Syed Hamid said: "We look at the matter as over with. We want to forge ahead towards regional and bilateral relations and we believe the East Timor government will be in place within two or three years."

As for Gusmao, who is president of the National Council for Timorese Resistance (NCTR) and the likely first president of independent East Timor, it was his first meeting with Dr Mahathir.

Syed Hamid and NCTR vice president and Nobel peace prize winner Jose Ramos-Horta were also present at the meeting.

Gusmao and Ramos-Horta arrived in Kuala Lumpur last night for a three-day visit as part of an Asian tour to gain support for the reconstruction of the ravaged territory.

They had earlier visited China, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines.

Syed Hamid said Gusmao and his delegation showed keen interest in Malaysia's achievements and praised Dr Mahathir for his contributions in this regard.

At the meeting Dr Mahathir offered East Timor assistance in human resource development and Malaysian expertise in gas and petroleum production as well as in training an efficient civil service, Syed Hamid said.

"We are willing to provide East Timor with whatever assistance within our means and capabilities. I think now we have to work the details out," Syed Hamid said.

Gusmao's visit to Felda, the land development agency and Mida, the industrial development authority and the briefing for him by the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) exemplified Malaysia's willingness to work with East Timor in the bilateral and regional context, Syed Hamid said.

Syed Hamid said Gusmao also expressed East Timor's willingness to emulate Malaysia's development formula.

"I think what Gusmao wanted is what's the formula of Malaysia's success," Syed Hamid said.

Dr Mahathir told the East Timorese delegation that Malaysia's success was due to the continuity of the government, political stability and racial harmony which also contributed to economic growth, Syed Hamid said.

The delegation members were also impressed with the federal administrative centre of Putra Jaya, Syed Hamid said.

"They even consider Malaysia a show case they will try to emulate," Syed Hamid said.

According to Syed Hamid, the prime minister also expressed Malaysia's willingness to explore investment opportunities in East Timor and that Gusmao invited Malaysian investors to venture there.

-- BERNAMA

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