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Singapore-Indonesia

NO FORMAL PROPOSAL FROM WAHID ON EAST TIMOR, PAPUA- SPORE

By: Tham Choy Lin

SINGAPORE, Nov 28 (Bernama) -- An aide to Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, rebutting an outburst by Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid against the island-state, said the latter did not formally propose at the just-concluded Asean Informal Summit here the inclusion of East Timor and Papua New Guinea into the grouping.

A two-page statement issued this evening by Goh's press secretary, Ong Keng Yong, also disputed Wahid's remarks that the Singapore premier never mentioned Indonesia in regional trade fairs or the southern part of the Asean region during the two-day summit chaired by Goh.

On the point made by Wahid not to follow Singapore's advice to master the English language which was supported by the Asean meeting, Ong said it was not Goh but Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who had advocated that.

The statement did not touch on Wahid's other remarks that Singapore was pursuing foreign policies only for profit and it despised Malays and considered them non-existent.

"PM Goh Chok Tong has read media reports of President Abdurrahman Wahid's recent comments on Singapore's role in the 4th Asean Informal Summit (AIS). As chairman of the 4th AIS, PM Goh's responsibility was to sum up ideas and suggestions on which Asean leaders had reached a consensus," said the statement.

Wahid, popularly known as Gus Dur, hit out at Singapore last Saturday during a meeting with the Indonesian community here on the last day of the summit.

He also berated Singapore's Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew for rejecting his proposal to include East Timor and Papua New Guinea into Asean, saying that if Lee was against the idea, other Asean members would say no as well.

He said he was proposing a new West Pacific Forum to include East Timor, Papua New Guinea, Australia and New Zealand.

"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 said.

"From my meeting with Lee Kuan Yew, it has also become clear that Singapore is only looking to reap profits from its relations with its neighbours," said Wahid who had also asked Dr Mahathir why Malaysia did not control water supply to Singapore.

He said if Indonesia and Malaysia withheld water supply, Singapore would have no water to drink.

Ong said Wahid had recounted at the summit that he had spoken to Lee on the possibility of the admission of East Timor and Papua New Guinea but did not put it up as a proposal.

"Had he done so, Asean practice requires a consensus on the admission of new members. It is not a matter that can be decided by one or two countries," said Ong.

Ong said the Asean leaders had agreed to Goh's proposal that Asean countries less affected by the financial and economic crisis should spearhead initiatives to restore Asean's credibility and attractiveness to investors.

This included trade fairs to which all Asean members would be invited and the trade fairs would be rotated among Asean capitals.

On Wahid's remarks that Goh never mentioned the southern part of the Asean region, Ong said during the AIS, the leaders agreed that Asean should consolidate itself, in particular, to integrate the newer members, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos with the rest of the grouping.

Most of the leaders and also their counterparts from China, Japan and

South Korea focused on projects in the Mekong Basin countries.

"Hence, PM Goh expressly proposed that at the next Asean summit in Brunei, the leaders should discuss how to help the eastern part of Asean (the Philippines, Kalimantan, East Malaysia and Brunei) to grow," he said.

- BERNAMA

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