

09/02/2000

PM on Horta's list of developing world's outstanding leaders

Hamisah Hamid

NOBEL peace prize winner Jose Ramos-Horta views Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as one of the outstanding leaders of the developing world, along with former South African President Nelson Mandela and Cuban leader Fidel Castro.

The East Timorese leader expressed his admiration for the three statesmen at a meeting with Foreign Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"According to Ramos-Horta the leaders whom he admires and regards as the most competent leaders in the Third World are Mandela, Castro and Dr Mahathir," Syed Hamid said after Ramos-Horta and National Council for Timorese Resistance president Xanana Gusmao paid him a courtesy call at Wisma Putra.

Both leaders are in Malaysia as part of an 18-day Asian tour to win support and aid for the reconstruction of East Timor.

They arrived in Kuala Lumpur yesterday night from Manila for a three-day visit on the last leg of their tour.

Yesterday morning, they paid a courtesy call on Syed Hamid before proceeding to the Defence Ministry to see Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Tun Razak and later Putrajaya, to visit Dr Mahathir in the afternoon.

Briefing the reporters after the meeting, Syed Hamid said Gusmao and Ramos-Horta had sought Malaysia's assistance in technical, training, management and diplomatic areas.

He said the leaders are impressed with Malaysia's achievements and hope to develop East Timor with Malaysia's assistance.

Ramos-Horta, who received the Nobel peace prize in 1996, escaped from the former Portuguese colony three days before the arrival of Indonesia troops in 1975 and became East Timor's independence activist.

Moving from one nation to another, he lobbied for global assistance for East Timor in its fight for independence from Indonesia.

Gusmao, who was the leader of the East Timorese armed resistance group, was jailed by Indonesian authorities for seven years and freed in September.

He is expected to be East Timor's first head of state when the territory achieves full independence in about two or three years' time.

For the time being, the UN Transitional Administration is running East Timor.

(END)