

Why Sri Lanka does not qualify to join Asean

1981 MAY 22

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Sri Lanka was geographically not qualified to become a member of Asean.

However, he said, the various member countries would have to give serious thought to Sri Lanka's intention to join Asean.

He was speaking to reporters after opening the two-day seminar on the Fourth Malaysia Plan organised by the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers here.

He also said he would not be able to attend the Asean Economic Ministers' meeting in Jakarta next week as the

Maldives President was visiting Malaysia then.

Primary Industries Minister Datuk Paul Leong will lead the Malaysian delegation to the meeting.

Application

The Deputy Prime Minister said the Jakarta meeting was expected to discuss the proposal to share energy resources among member countries.

"Inter-Asean transport, mainly sea transport, will also be discussed at the meeting."

On preferential trading arrangements (PTA), Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had agreed in principle to increase the tariff cut

from 10 per cent to 20.

In **MANILA:** Asean Secretary-General Narcisco Reyes said Asean would give "serious consideration" to any application by Sri Lanka to join the five-member body.

But Asean diplomats, here for an Asean standing committee meeting which opened today, indicated that geographic, political and economic factors would have to be taken into account.

Speaking to *Reuter* during a break in today's meeting, Mr Reyes said the 14-year-old organisation had not received notification of Sri Lanka's intention to apply, announced in Colombo yesterday by State Min-

ister Anandatissa de Alwis.

But the Filipino diplomat noted that Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa, in a tour of four Asean countries last month, had expressed renewed interest in joining the non-communist organisation.

"Any application would be given serious consideration," Mr Reyes said, adding that it would probably have to be channelled through the chairman of the standing committee, currently Philippine Foreign Minister Carlos Romulo.

He said it could be discussed at the next meeting of the standing committee in June prior to the annual Asean Foreign Ministers' meeting here. — *Reuter*