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Alatas-Myanmar

ALATAS SAYS ASEAN NEVER DIVIDED OVER MYANMAR'S ENTRY

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 7 (Bernama) -- There has never been any split or disagreement among Asean members over the entry of Myanmar into the regional grouping, Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said today.

He said some members had expressed their views on the timing of Myanmar's entry, not on the principle of the country's membership in Asean.

"There's no split whatsoever and there has never been any disagreement among Asean," he said in response to questions on Myanmar at a news conference here.

It was held after a meeting between Indonesian President Suharto and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Suharto ended his two-day working visit to Malaysia today.

Asean now comprises Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Cambodia and Laos are set to join the grouping next year while Myanmar has submitted a formal application for full Asean membership.

Alatas said the two leaders had a general discussion on Myanmar and they shared the view that constructive engagement was the best approach given the situation in Myanmar and Asean's principles regarding its relations with other countries.

He said Myanmar had to fulfil certain technical procedures before it could join Asean, just like other new members.

Alatas said Asean foreign ministers agreed during their recent informal meeting in New York that the procedures should be allowed to take place.

"We have agreed in New York to let these procedures take place and we will see whether it's 1997, 1998, we don't know yet...we will see," he said when asked whether Myanmar would be accepted as a member during the annual Asean foreign ministers meeting in Kuala Lumpur next year. -- BERNAMA

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