

30 MAR 1996

Mahathir - Cambodia

CAMBODIA DESCRIBED AS MALAYSIA'S 14TH STATE OUT OF ENVY

KAUALA LUMPUR, March 30 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said certain quarters who are envious of Malaysia's involvement in Cambodia have described the country as Malaysia's fourteenth state.

He said Cambodia's First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh told him that France had accused Cambodia of favouring Malaysia, particularly in terms of investments, because his (Ranariddh's) wife is of Malay origin.

Speaking to reporters after meeting Ranariddh who is on a one-day visit to Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said: "Even he had said so just now ... he said France seems envious and alleges that he appears to favour Malaysia because his wife is of Malay origin.

"He acknowledges that his wife is of Malay descent but that is not the reason for his close relationship with Malaysia."

Dr Mahathir was commenting on a report in a foreign magazine that described Cambodia as Malaysia's fourteenth state.

"It is this feeling of jealousy that has caused the allegation to be made," he said, adding that Malaysia had been very careful in its investments in Cambodia.

Dr Mahathir said his discussion with Ranariddh also touched on the problems of development and administration in Cambodia.

"I told him that whatever help we can extend to resolve the problems, we will do so," he said.

The Prime Minister added that Ranariddh also offered several suggestions on the development of the Mekong Basin but declined to elaborate on the suggestions.

Asked on the accusation that Malaysian businessmen were grabbing business opportunities in Cambodia, Ranariddh said: "I was able to clarify all of those accusations (to Dr Mahathir) but declined to say what kind of clarification he gave.

He assured Dr Mahathir that projects which had Malaysian involvement were going on well and hoped that more Malaysian investors would go to his country.

Ranariddh also said he told Dr Mahathir of Cambodia's support of the Mekong Basin project. Malaysia is heading a special committee on the project.

He said Cambodia was ready to attend the official- and ministerial-level meeting on the development of the basin scheduled here in the middle of the year.

"I've also suggested to Dr Mahathir that a summit meeting be convened in Kuala Lumpur to get, in principle, the greenlight from all the prime ministers and heads of government concerned as well as Japan," he said.

The Mekong river basin, a sub-region comprising two Asean countries -- Vietnam and Thailand -- and three potential members, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, also encompasses five provinces in south-western China.

The sub-region has been recognised as Asia's southwest growth circle having great potential for economic development with a market of 325 million. -- BERNAMA

MAM