

30 NOV 1996

Mahathir-Summit

JAPAN, CHINA AND SOUTH KOREA MAY ATTEND SECOND INFORMAL SUMMIT

JAKARTA, Nov 30 (Bernama) -- Malaysia, which will host the second Asean Informal Summit next year, may invite the leaders of Japan, China and South Korea, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Speaking at a news conference at the end of the one-day first Asean Informal Summit here, he said that it was possible leaders from the three countries would be invited as Asean's guests to the summit which also coincided with the 30th anniversary of the regional grouping.

"It is also possible that we invite other countries as well but that is left to be seen," he said.

The three countries are the prospective members of the Asean-initiated East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC), a loose consultative forum aimed at enhancing economic cooperation among the countries in the region.

Apart from the three countries, the Informal Summit in Kuala Lumpur would also be attended by leaders of Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.

On the issue of Sipadan and Ligitan islands, Dr Mahathir said the decision by Malaysia and Indonesia to bring the matter to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), would not be a bad precedence neither would it bring any harm to the Asean concept of solving their problems within the body.

"It is accepted that there must be some way of settling disputes between two countries by involving a court rather than through continuous long discussions or involving our neighbours who may not want to be involved and who may have other things on their agenda," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the matter was referred to the ICJ instead of to the Asean High Council (AHC) because there was a small problem which made it difficult for Malaysia to use the Asean mechanism.

"Every Asean country has got a claim against Malaysia. We are right in the middle of Asean and we have border problems with all other six Asean countries."

"So Asean cannot determine because they are all involved. There is a conflict of interest here, which is why Malaysia and Indonesia decided to take the other course, to resort it to the world court. I think that is one way of solving this problem and it is a good way," he said.

He said before this, Malaysia had also agreed with Singapore to bring their dispute over "one small rock in the middle of the sea" to the world court.

Asked on whether the claims to the reefs in the South China Sea can also be resolved in the same manner, Dr Mahathir said: "Of course it can be resolved by the International Court provided everybody agreed."

However, he said it seemed that there would be parties which would not agree to such a course of action and therefore it could not be resolved through the international court.

"We will have to find some other ways to resolve this problem," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said he had briefed the Asean leaders on the progress of the Mekong Basin Development and the leaders had a lengthy discussion on it. Malaysia is the coordinating country for the project.

He said the discussions had specifically focused on the proposed trans-Asia railway project.

"We now accept that there will be actually three railway lines. One passing through Myanmar going on to China, another passing through Laos and

again going to China and another one passing through Cambodia, Vietnam and then on to China," he said.

The project would be managed by the private sector and it was suggested that a consortium of companies of Asean countries be formed so that they would undertake the whole project to hold ways so that parts which were not profitable would be subsidised more or else by the more profitable segments.

Dr Mahathir said there was also some discussions on the tourist facilities in Laos and in other regions. -- BERNAMA

TEAM AAM