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Ghazali-Asean

NO REASON TO STOP MYANMAR JOINING ASEAN NEXT YEAR, SAYS GHAZALI

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 11 (Bernama) -- Former Foreign Minister Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, who played an instrumental role in the formation of Asean, said he saw no reason why Myanmar should not join the grouping next year.

"Yes, why not?" he said when asked if Asean should accept Myanmar along with Laos and Cambodia next year and fulfil the Asean aspiration of embracing all 10 Southeast Asian countries.

In an interview with Bernama, Ghazali said it would be a dream come true to see the countries coming together under the banner of Asean which celebrates its 30th anniversary next year.

When it was formed, he said, Asean did not set a deadline for all the 10 countries to eventually become members.

"When they are ready, they can come in...so by next year the aspiration of the founding fathers (would be realised)," said the 74-year-old Ghazali who continues to play an active role in international affairs.

A report from Tokyo today quoted Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as saying that Asean will "very likely" grant membership to Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia next year.

"It is very likely it will come next year," Dr Mahathir said in an interview with the Yomiuri Shimbun and the English-language Yomiuri Daily.

Malaysia will host the anniversary celebration of Asean whose other members are Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Asean leaders agreed at an informal summit meeting in Jakarta on Nov 30 to allow Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia to join simultaneously, but stopped short of setting a date.

Ghazali dismissed Western calls for sanctions on Myanmar, saying it was not the way to bring changes.

"The way to change people is to be close to the people, not to separate them," said Ghazali who was the chairman of a commission set up in 1990 to study and make recommendations on the revamping and strengthening of the Asean mechanism.

He also served as a special representative for the Bosnia-Herzegovina election in September this year and participated in the Commonwealth team of observers to the Bangladesh and South Africa elections. -- BERNAMA

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