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AEM: NO SETBACK IN MAKING THE EAEC A REALITY, SAYS RAFIDAH

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PETALING JAYA, Oct 18 (Bernama) -- The East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) will not face a setback despite the move by China and South Korea to put off their scheduled meeting here with the Asean economic ministers.

International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said today their absence would not in any way affect the EAEC, a loose consultative forum proposed by Malaysia whose potential members comprise the nine Asean countries, China, South Korea and Japan.

She said her counterparts from China and South Korea had to make the last-minute cancellations of the consultations between Asean and the two countries due to their commitments at home.

"No, nothing of that sort towards the realisation of the EAEC," she said when asked if the decision by China and South Korea to skip the meeting would be a setback to the EAEC, an idea mooted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and endorsed by Asean.

Rafidah was speaking at a joint news conference at the end of the informal meeting between the Asean economic ministers and their counterpart from Japan, Mitsuo Horiuchi.

Talks between Asean and Australia, New Zealand and the Southern African Development Community were concluded yesterday.

Rafidah said the Chinese economic minister was unable to make it for the meeting because she had to attend an important programme while the Korean minister had to attend the Parliament sitting.

She said the Asean-China and Asean-South Korea consultations had to be postponed because the economic ministers of the two countries could not attend and were only able to send their deputies.

"We decided to wait for a time when all countries could be represented by their ministers," she said, adding that "the first meeting should be at ministerial level."

The 29th Asean Economic Ministers meeting last Thursday had noted the increasing receptiveness of the EAEC among the Asia-Pacific countries and agreed to continue the efforts towards its realisation. The AEM has been appointed has the operational modality for the caucus.

There has been an on-going development of projects on small and medium scale industries under the Asian grouping.

Asean groups Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. --BERNAMA

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