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Anwar: Malaysia looks forward to Asean-10

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MALAYSIA would like to see Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos become members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations latest in December, said Acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

While hoping for the three countries to make entry into Asean during the grouping's summit in Kuala Lumpur, he said debate on the timing of their entry was a non-issue because Asean leaders have agreed that the vision of an Asean-10 will be realised this year.

Cambodia and Laos are certain of their Asean membership this year but not so Myanmar, whose domestic issues continue to draw international oppositions to its membership.

"There is no question about delaying our decision. We have been consistent that the admission will be, at the latest, by the summit. However, the process may take some time and there can be delays because we adhere to the principle of consensus," he told reporters in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

He was asked to comment on a report today that the three countries would be taken into Asean at the end of this year, not in July as previously expected.

The report stated that the countries had hoped to join Asean at the seven-member grouping's ministerial meeting here on July 24 and 25.

Alleged human rights abuses said to be committed by the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council in Myanmar have prompted calls, including from the Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement (Abim), for the entry to be delayed.

As to whether Malaysia plans to assist Cambodia in tackling its domestic problems, Anwar said Malaysia has been supportive.

"In the past, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had actually assigned the Foreign Ministry officials to talk to the various political party leaders of Cambodia so that they can work out an amicable solution to their dispute," he added.

On Abim's claim that Myanmar is oppressing its Muslim citizens, Anwar said the movement should submit a full report to him to justify their allegation.

AFP reports: Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto yesterday warned that Myanmar's expected entry into Asean could be interpreted as a gesture of support for Yangon's military regime.

"We do not want to meddle in the process of eventually giving the green light to Asean membership for Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia," Hashimoto told reporters.

"But we would not like Myanmar's entry to be seen as a pardon for the military regime."

In Myanmar on Tuesday, hundreds of riot police barred access to a planned congress of the opposition National League of Democracy (NLD) at the home in Yangon of the party's leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The congress coincided with the seventh anniversary of Aung San Suu Kyi's landslide election victory which was not recognised by the military regime.

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