

20/06/1997

Asean concerned with situation in Cambodia: Dollah

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THE Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean) is concerned with the latest development in Cambodia but does not think it will affect the country's membership in the grouping.

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is chairman of Asean Standing Committee, said "the situation is not as bad as reported".

Abdullah said he will ask Malaysian Ambassador to Cambodia Kamal Ismaun to submit a report on the real situation in Cambodia.

"I want to know what is going on there," he told reporters in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Abdullah said he has conveyed Asean's concerns about the latest development to co-Prime Ministers Prince Ranariddh and Hun Sen.

Both had assured him earlier that they will both work things out to ensure a better situation.

"The leaders themselves have told me they knew cooperation was crucial and could not be avoided for the future of the country, and that they do not wish to see country as it was in the past.

"We hope the country can continue to be peaceful and that the leaders will try to solve their problems," Abdullah said.

According to newsreports, Phnom Penh was rocked on Tuesday evening by a two-hour gunfight between the bodyguards of First Prime Minister Prince Ranariddh and Second Prime Minister Hun Sen.

Two of Ranariddh's bodyguards were killed in the clash.

Abdullah said it is unnecessary for Malaysia, as Asean chairman, to be the mediator in the rift between Ranariddh and Hun Sen as it is "an internal problem".

"We cannot name ourselves as a mediator. Let them settle this by themselves.

"However, we can convey the message that as neighbours and as Asean members, we are concerned about the situation," Abdullah added.

At a special Asean Ministerial Meeting in Kuala Lumpur earlier this month, Asean decided that Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar will be brought in as members next month.

Even then, the Cambodian situation had been cited as a concern in realising the Asean-10 aspiration by this year. Ranariddh and Hun Sen have been feuding over a number of issues, such as power sharing and on how the Government should respond to Khmer Rouge's Pol Pot.

Abdullah said he did not want to make any speculation on the matter.

"I do not want to speculate. I will only comment on what I see. Internal politics changes all the time. Sometimes in a day, sometimes in an hour. There is no speculation that is accurate. We only hope for the better," he added.

Meanwhile, the resignation of Turkey's premier Necmettin Erbakan will not affect the Developing-Eight (D-8), Abdullah said.

"I don't know why he resigned. However, D-8 will continue because the group is built on economic cooperation. We don't discuss religious matters during the D-8. We only want to work together for the betterment of the members. D-8 members are of the consensus that the group is good for them," Abdullah added.

D-8 is a cooperation group of eight Muslim countries, patterned on the Group of Seven gathering of the seven most industrialised nations. The formation of the grouping was made by Erbakan.

It was reported that Erbakan stepped down on Wednesday to allow his conservative ally Tansu Ciller to assume the premiership. The D-8 held its inaugural summit in Istanbul last Sunday which was attended by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Abdullah represented Malaysia as the ministerial meeting that preceded the summit.

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