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Asean-Speculators

ASEAN DIALOGUE PARTNERS WANT ACTION AGAINST "ROGUE SPECULATORS"

KUALA LUMPUR, July 28 (Bernama) -- Foreign ministers of Asean's dialogue partners have suggested that action be taken against those behind the manipulation of the region's currencies.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said that they want action to be taken if there was proof against them.

The foreign ministers expressed their concern over the currency fluctuations to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when they called on him at the Prime Minister's Department, said Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who led the delegation.

"If indeed there is proof, then certain action would certainly have to be taken in this matter," he told Malaysian journalists after today's session of the Post Ministerial Meeting here.

Among the foreign ministers were United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, China's Qian Qichen and Australia's Alexander Downer.

Dr Mahathir said two days ago that American financier George Soros was behind the manipulation of Asean currencies since early this month.

Dr Mahathir had told reporters here that the government would take action against the "rogue speculators."

Abdullah said that several of the foreign ministers stated that it was difficult for them to believe that it was the work of only one individual (Soros).

"They stated that value of currencies depended on market forces...However, they feel that if there is proof (that Soros was responsible), then action had to be taken," said Abdullah.

On whether there is such proof, Abdullah said: "Maybe what the Prime Minister has is proof enough."

Abdullah also said that Dr Mahathir was expected to raise the issue at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) forum in Vancouver later this year.

On the East Asia Economic Caucus, Abdullah said that prospective members China, Japan and South Korea had indicated their intention to attend an informal meeting between them and Asean leaders here at the end of the year.

The meeting would be held in conjunction with the Asean informal summit in December, said Abdullah.

Asked regarding the Post Ministerial Conference Meeting held following the 30th Asean Ministerial Meeting here, he said that among the issues discussed related to the Asean Free Trade Area (Afta), Apec, World Trade Organisation, Mekong Basin development, West Asia, Bosnia, the drug menace and the environment.

On the Mekong Basin development, he said that several countries had shown interest in taking part in the project.

"At the meeting, we discussed practical programmes that could be implemented," he said.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said the attack on the currencies was a phenomenon because strong economies were under siege thus raising the question if it was more than just economic forces at work.

He said it was understandable if the currency of an economy undergoing difficulty was being probed for its weakness.

"The phenomenon we see now is the attack on very strong economies...economies which are not in difficulty. Economies, in other

words, which are very sound macro-economies.

"So the question arises whether is it purely economic forces at work or are there other forces at work. Is it political or economic?" he asked. --  
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