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Mahathir-Asean

ASEAN HAS THE RIGHT TO REJECT MEMBERSHIP, SAYS PM

By: Zainoor Sulaiman

OKAYAMA, July 20 (Bernama) -- Asean has the right to accept or reject any country in Southeast Asia from becoming a member of the regional association, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today.

This should not be viewed as an encroachment into the internal affairs of any country, he said during an open dialogue with Toyama Prefecture governor Nasahiro Ishii and chairman of the prefectural Business Cooperation Committee Katsumi Sasaki, here about 600km southwest of Tokyo.

"We still hope that we will have all the 10 Southeast Asian countries in Asean," he said, adding that due to the "unclear" situation in Cambodia, Asean had decided to delay its membership. Asean foreign ministers will meet in Kuala Lumpur later this week to officially accept two other remaining Southeast Asian countries -- Myanmar and Laos -- into its fold.

"We have no intention to interfere (in the internal affairs of Cambodia)," he said. "I hope there will be no obstruction for anybody from joining Asean," he added.

Dr Mahathir who is on a seven-day holiday cum working visit to Japan arrived here Friday. He visited Kobe on Wednesday and made a day trip to Toyama, 400km north of here yesterday.

Replying to a question on East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC), Dr Mahathir said smaller countries in Southeast Asia were often ignored by Europe and America when they voiced their opinions on unfair trade practices.

He said that with the participation of stronger and more influential north-east Asian countries like Japan and China through EAEC, "We can put forward our views more strongly when we discuss with the European Union and America."

Dr Mahathir also described as an interference of domestic policy on international affairs of a law passed in Massachusetts, America banning foreign companies investing in Myanmar from doing business in the states.

Japan has filed a complaint with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) against the United States over the issue.

He said that if Japan was successful in addressing the issue, Malaysia would also benefit from it.

On China, Dr Mahathir said he believed that Beijing would emerge as a big economic power in the future.

He said China had the right to develop and provide better living standard for its people.

"We should not look at China as potential threat," he said. "If we look on a country as an enemy in the future, it will become our enemy now," he said. --BERNAMA

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