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Mahathir-Myanmar

ASEAN INDEPENDENT ENOUGH TO MAKE OWN DECISION

PETALING JAYA, April 30 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad reiterated today that Asean leaders had agreed during an informal summit in Jakarta last year to admit Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos into Asean simultaneously.

When asked at a news conference if the three countries would be admitted in July, he said: "Yes, we think they should because we think that is the best thing that can happen."

He also said Asean would not bow to American pressure over Myanmar's entry into the grouping as "we are independent enough to make our own decisions."

Dr Mahathir said even sections of the American business community did not support their government's action to impose sanctions against Yangon.

Over the past few days, other Asean countries have also said that Myanmar should be admitted into its fold despite Washington's attempt to discourage them.

"Unless something unusual happens, I feel Myanmar will be admitted," said Dr Mahathir.

Asked what sort of event could hinder Myanmar's entry, Dr Mahathir said in jest: "Perhaps when the government slaughters five million people in Myanmar, we might change our mind."

Asean foreign ministers are scheduled to meet in Kuala Lumpur next month to finalise the agenda for their annual meeting in July which includes the admission of new members.

Dr Mahathir also expressed regret over the action taken against Singapore Opposition party leader Tang Liang Hong for making public the contents of an affidavit in which there were certain remarks about Johor.

"I do not want to prolong the issue but what I regret is only one thing why Tang is blamed for disclosing the contents of the affidavit. It was not even exposed by him but by lawyer (Abdul Razak Ahmad)," he said.

"Whether he reveals it or not and even if we do not know the contents of the affidavit in which there were remarks about Johor they nevertheless do represent the views of a Singapore leader," he said after attending a two-hour closed door dialogue with participants of the Vision 2020 National Congress here.

On the report in the Straits Times of Singapore listing the various crimes committed in Johor, the Prime Minister said: "I do not want to say anything. Everyone has his opinion on the report."

He said even though several Cabinet Ministers had voiced their objections to the Straits Times report, he said the government would not take any action.

"As I have said, it will take some time for us to overcome our disappointment. I do not want to say anything further." -- BERNAMA

TEAM AHH AAM