

25/07/1997

Asean not mediating between two parties in dispute

ASEAN is not mediating between any two parties in the Cambodian crisis, the Philippines' Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Rodolfo C. Severino, said.

"We are trying to help contribute to stability in Cambodia. We are not mediating anything," he told reporters after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad opened the 30th Asean Ministerial Meeting yesterday.

On Myanmar's entry into Asean, Severino said Asean would deal with any protest by other countries or organisations like the European Union as and when the occasion arose.

"We will have to see what action the European Commission takes and then we will deal with that," he said, adding that up to now things were being discussed hypothetically.

"There have been statements of warning, but we will deal with the situation when actual decisions have to be made."

Severino emphasised that Asean was against discriminatory treatment of its members.

On whether Dr Mahathir's speech, seen by some as "combative", signalled a more assertive Asean in future, Severino said Dr Mahathir's views would be taken very seriously, but that he (Dr Mahathir) had been saying them for years.

"Certainly his words will be taken very seriously but it so happened that Malaysia is host for this year's Asean meeting.

"I wouldn't say his words were combative but his views are very incisive and he is very forthright," he said, adding, "I appreciate that."

Severino said Asean's population of almost 500 million gave it more weight in the world, both in sheer numbers and as a larger market.

He added, however, that it would also take greater effort to maintain Asean's cohesion as its members were now more diverse.

(END)