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Mahathir-Li Peng

CHINA REAFFIRMS SUPPORT FOR EAEC

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 22 (Bernama) -- Visiting China's premier Li Peng today reiterated Beijing's support for the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) but felt it would take some time before the Asean-initiated "project" could formally take off.

Li Peng reaffirmed China's backing of the EAEC during talks with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who had mooted the idea in 1990.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said this when briefing reporters on the talks at the Prime Minister's Department here.

Abdullah said Li Peng had told Dr Mahathir that he was aware of the discussions between the prospective members of the EAEC, a loose consultative forum.

Apart from China and the nine Asean members namely Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, the other prospective members of the caucus are Japan and South Korea.

Heads of government of these countries are scheduled to meet here in December during the Second Asean Informal Summit.

Abdullah said Li, who arrived here yesterday for a four-day official visit, said the coming informal summit would be an opportunity for them to better understand the caucus and share experiences.

Abdullah said international issues including multi-polarity, the latest developments in Cambodia, overlapping claims in South China Sea and human rights dominated the talks between the two leaders.

He said Dr Mahathir's meeting with Li Peng, which lasted for more than two hours, was the prime minister's longest ever bilateral talk with a foreign leader.

On multi-polarity, Abdullah said Dr Mahathir and Li Peng agreed that the centres of power should not only be confined or limited to one country but rather spread out to other continents like Europe and Asia.

"It was his (Li Peng's) view that other centres of power in Europe and Asia should also be developed, be given attention," he said.

Abdullah said Li Peng felt that at the moment, there was so much attention placed on the role of the United States in international affairs.

"And unfortunately there has been occasion where the US decided to resort to a number of actions on the basis of unilateral decision and this may not be in the interests of the international community," Abdullah said.

It has been suggested that therefore new centres of power could also be developed, Abdullah said.

"The idea is that there should be fairness in international relations," he said while reminding reporters that the Mahathir-Li Peng talks should not be construed as a US-bashing session.

On Cambodia, the two leaders agreed that the best solution to resolve the power struggle in that country would be through the general election scheduled for May next year.

Abdullah also said Malaysia was concerned over reports of latest clashes along the Thai-Cambodia border.

It was reported that some 2,500 Cambodian civilians have streamed into eastern Thailand over recent days following isolated clashes between troops loyal to a Khmer Rouge defector and forces of Cambodia's Second Prime Minister Hun Sen.

On the overlapping claims over the Spratlys, both leaders agreed that it was important not to let the issue to adversely affect relations between

China and Asean either as a grouping or individually.

On Malaysia's proposal for a review of the 1948 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, Abdullah said China supported it and was even willing to participate in any expert group assigned to study the declaration with a view for a review.

Meanwhile, later at a separate press briefing on the talks between the two leaders, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Shen Guofang said Li had expressed satisfaction with Malaysia-China bilateral relation over the recent years.

Li described the relation as having taken a directional development because both sides were able to perceive a strategic level their ties were headed for, he said.

Both Dr Mahathir and Li expressed satisfaction with the growth of economic and trade ties and hoped for greater cooperation. he said.

Both leaders also looked forward to exploring new solutions to problems that had cropped up in existing joint-venture projects, Shen said.

He said the two premiers also discussed the strengthening of financial cooperation between their countries by setting up branches of their main banks in Beijing and Kuala Lumpur.

The Bank of China and Malayan Banking Bhd (Maybank) would set up a branch each in the respective capital. The banks would work out the details.

Shen said Li also encouraged China's businessmen to invest in Malaysia and vice-versa.

China welcomed investments especially in transportation, infrastructure, telecommunications and automobile industries, he said.

On Li's earlier meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim at Li's hotel suite, Shen said Anwar mainly briefed Li on the recent financial turbulence in the region.

There were no specific discussions on whether China would be giving support to the affected countries as Li and Anwar only exchanged views on the issue, he added. -- BERNAMA

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