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China reaffirms support for EAEC

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CHINA has reaffirmed its support for the Asean-sponsored East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC).

Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng, who first declared his support for the idea in 1990, said there is need, however, to involve Japan and South Korea.

This, he reckoned, may take some time. But even so, Li told Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that "the East Asia cooperation can be done in many forms, including via informal discussions".

Li was one of the first Asian leaders to openly support the EAEC idea, when he visited Malaysia in 1990.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who was also present at the meeting between the two leaders yesterday, later told reporters that Li was aware of the need to get support from other prospective members namely Japan and South Korea so that the caucus can take off.

Asean and three other prospective EAEC members - China, South Korea and Japan - are scheduled to meet in Kuala Lumpur in December for Asean's informal summit.

Asean comprises Brunei, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Malaysia.

"Li said the coming informal summit would be an opportunity for them to better understand the caucus and share experience, and hopefully the caucus would take off from there," Abdullah added.

On overlapping claims over the Spratly islands in South China Sea, Abdullah said both Li and Dr Mahathir shared the same view that the issue should be solved through proper channels such as taking the matter to the Convention of the Law of the Sea.

"While recognising that it takes time to solve the dispute, this should not adversely affect the current strong relations and cooperation between China and Asean as well as between China and other claimants in the region," he added.

In fact, he said the two leaders felt that there are other important matters that should be given due attention such as stimulating economic cooperation and development in the region.

Besides Malaysia, other Asean members involved in the Spratly's dispute are Vietnam, Brunei, and Philippines.

On Cambodia, Abdullah said both Li and Dr Mahathir agreed that Phnom Penh should be admitted into Asean as soon as possible so that the grouping can assist the country to achieve political stability and carry out development programmes.

"Both leaders also want to see the commitment from Cambodia towards ensuring that its general election would be held next year.

"They are of the opinion that the Cambodia's issue can be resolved through such an election," he reiterated.

On bilateral issues, Abdullah said there were not many issues discussed, and the two leaders talked on enhancing air links and making Langkawi as a transit point for Chinese pilgrims to perform the Haj.

"Both leaders agreed that these matters can be discussed further by the relevant ministries and agencies," he added.

Abdullah said China also showed interest to cooperate with Malaysia in helping African nations as well as other poor countries.

"Both agreed that China can cooperate in terms of mobilising expertise

and personnel for projects in Africa.

"In fact, China is also helping the African nations in projects, and Malaysia can take advantage by pooling in more resources and funds," the foreign minister added.

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