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Asean-PMC (Abdullah)

GIVE CAMBODIA TIME AND SUPPORT, SAYS ABDULLAH

KUALA LUMPUR, July 28 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has told Asean dialogue partners that Cambodia should be given time and support to resolve its current crisis.

"There is one reality however. A durable and enduring solution to the complex Cambodian situation must include a heavy percentage of local content," he said in his opening remarks at the two-day Asean Post-Ministerial Meeting here today.

The Cambodian issue had dominated all week at the 30th Asean Ministerial Meeting (AMM) and the just-concluded Asean Regional Forum (ARF) Ministerial Meeting here.

Among Asean's 10 dialogue partners are major donor countries, the United States, Japan and Australia, who are considering using aid as a leverage to force the Cambodian problem to a settlement.

Asean has been tasked with the leading role to engage in the peace process pending confirmation from Phnom Penh on its role.

Abdullah also reiterated Asean's resolve to take counter measures against currency fluctuations caused by rogue traders that place Asean economies at risk.

"It is time that we recognise these actions for what they really are, namely, villainous acts of sabotage," he said.

Abdullah said it was "really the height of international criminality that the fate of millions could be subjected to the mercy of a few unscrupulous traders."

Malaysia's Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said two days ago that American financier George Soros was behind the manipulation of Asean currencies since early this month.

On the PMC, Abdullah said the annual meeting between Asean and its dialogue partners was still relevant and was in no danger of being subsumed under the ARF process as feared.

"There is a distinction between the issues covered. While the ARF deals with the politico-security issues of the region, the PMC covers those subjects which are inter-regional in nature or those with wider, global dimensions," he said.

He said the series of PMC dialogues were important for Asean's external relations because it provided a forum for Asean to exchange views with major players in and outside the region.

To remain viable, the PMC must keep up with new demands while continuing to discuss traditional issues such as drug trafficking, environmental degradation and terrorism, he said.

Abdullah said regional cooperation would continue to be an important vehicle for growth and the Asean-Mekong Basin Development Cooperation would realise the economic potentials of the riparian states of the Mekong river and other countries in the region.

The admission of Laos and Myanmar has further consolidated Southeast Asia as a cohesive regional community as it enters the 21st century, said Abdullah.

With the two new members, Asean now has a population of half a billion and its combined gross domestic product of US\$600 billion is expected to surpass US\$1 trillion in the next decade. -- BERNAMA

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