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Mahathir-Myanmar

MAHATHIR: ASEAN MAY BOYCOTT ASEM IF MYANMAR IS BARRED

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 1 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight that Asean might decide to boycott the Second Asia Europe Meeting (Asem) in London in April next year if the European Union bars Myanmar from attending.

"If there is discrimination against Myanmar, it is a discrimination against Asean. You may find other countries in Asean also deciding not to attend," the Prime Minister said.

He was commenting on British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's statement in a meeting of business leaders in Singapore earlier today that Europe's recent decision to deny visas to senior Myanmar officials made their inclusion at the Asem "impossible".

He condemned the Myanmar government for profiting from the drugs trade and said it would not be admitted to a summit of European and Asian nations next year.

ASEM is a forum linking the 15 members of the European Union with Japan, China, South Korea and some Asean members.

Dr Mahathir also reiterated his stand not to have any dialogue or debate with American billionaire financier George Soros whom he had described as one of the "rouge speculators" responsible in bringing down the value of the ringgit and other Asean currencies.

" I don't want to debate with him, it will not amount to anything.

"A man who talks about being a philanthropist -- takes money from the poor people, give a little to other people and keep the rest for himself -- is no philanthropist. I will not argue with such people," he said.

He said the poor people in Malaysia were made even poorer by 17 per cent because of the drop in the currency strength.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir accompanied his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali at the dinner of the International Conference of the Pacific and Southeast Asian Women Association (PPSEAWA) at a leading hotel here.

The dinner was attended by 350 delegates from 22 countries attending the two-day conference. -- BERNAMA

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