

17 NOV 1997

MAHATHIR:DON'T LEAVE MYANMAR OUT OF ASEM

LANGKAWI, Nov 17 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Myanmar should not be excluded from the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in London next year as it is now a member of Asean.

He said keeping Myanmar out would not help bring about the changes that were expected of Yangon.

"Asean views that there should be direct contact with the people of Myanmar because in that way, it can help influence them in accepting the kind of norms the world seems to be insisting on," he told a joint news conference with French President Jacques Chirac here.

Dr Mahathir was replying to a French journalist who wanted to know the prime minister's stand on Myanmar's exclusion from the meeting.

Dr Mahathir said to lay conditions on Myanmar was not conducive to boosting dialogue between regional partners.

"We should determine who represents Asean or Southeast Asian countries (for ASEM). It is for us to decide," he said.

Myanmar and Laos were admitted into Asean last July expanding membership of the Southeast Asian grouping to nine alongside Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Phillipines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

The first ASEM was held last year in Bangkok. -- BERNAMA

ARA rn