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Ranariddh-Cambodia

MALAYSIAN INVESTORS IN CAMBODIA ARE "HAPPY", SAYS RANARIDDH

KUALA LUMPUR, June 6 (Bernama) -- Cambodian First Prime Minister Norodom Ranariddh today admitted that his country was experiencing "political instability" but assured Malaysian investors that the "problem" will be resolved.

He said with Asean's decision to accept Cambodia into the grouping, "we are able to really achieve political stability".

Ranariddh said this when asked if Malaysian investments were safe in Cambodia in view of the fragile political situation in Phnom Penh caused by a power struggle.

He had earlier attended the 11th Asia-Pacific Roundtable (APR) discussions opened by Malaysia's Acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The United Nations-sponsored elections in 1993 brought to an end years of civil war and genocide committed earlier by leftist Khmer Rouge revolutionary forces in Cambodia.

But the elected coalition government remains unstable amid an internal power struggle and violence over the past few months, including a recent grenade attack in Phnom Penh.

Ranariddh said Phnom Penh-Kuala Lumpur ties and the Malaysian investments in Cambodia were "going quite well" despite the political crisis.

He denied that Malaysian companies in Cambodia were facing problems. "On the contrary, I think the Malaysian investors are quite happy," he said.

It was reported last April that Cambodian Second Prime Minister Hun Sen had written a letter to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad criticising the action by Ranariddh to declare several agreements involving the investment of a Malaysia company, Ariston Sdn Bhd, in Cambodia as null and void.

In the letter, Hun Sen had assured the Malaysian Prime Minister that the agreements were still legitimate. The agreement was part of a RM3.25 billion project undertaken by Ariston to develop Sihanoukville town as a tourist destination.

Asked if Cambodia was ready to join Asean in July, Ranariddh said Cambodia was "more than ready".

Asean foreign ministers had, during a special meeting here on May 31, decided to admit Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar into the grouping in July during the Asean Ministerial Meeting.

Ranariddh said Cambodia's entry into Asean would help its national reconciliation process and also speed up development.

He also said Cambodia would be able to intergrate into the Asean Free Trade Area (Afta) by the year 2008.

On the recent killings of two Malaysians in Cambodia, Ranariddh said he was not informed of the matter by the Malaysian ambassador to Cambodia "although I have met him many times (after the incident)".

However, he said his government would probe into the matter, adding that he suspected the killings could have been the work of "common criminals".

The two Malaysians employed by Double Ace Investment Limited, a Malaysian company working on a timber concession in Cambodia, were killed in an attack reportedly took place in Kratie province, 600km from Phnom Penh.

Malaysia's ambassador to Cambodia Kamal Ismaun was reported to have said the two Malaysians were killed by armed bandits.

When asked if Cambodia was safe now, Ranariddh said: "If Cambodia is not safe, how could I leave Cambodia and attend this (Asia-Pacific) conference. My presence here means all is well in Cambodia." --BERNAMA

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