

09/07/1997

Stay out of Cambodia's affairs, says Hun Sen

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - As Asean Foreign Ministers prepare for a special meeting on Thursday to discuss developments in Cambodia, the country's second Prime Minister Hun Sen told the international community to stay out of its affairs.

Hun Sen, who ousted his co-Premier Prince Norodom Ranariddh earlier this week, said the international community should not put any pressure on Cambodia and the people should be left alone.

"I would like to appeal to the international community to understand the internal situation in Cambodia," Reuters quoted him as saying in a speech broadcast on television.

"Let the Cambodian people solve this problem by themselves without any interference and external pressure."

He said acting Head of State, Chea Sim, would write a letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations to explain the current situation in his country.

Asean, meanwhile, called for an immediate ceasefire in Phnom Penh and urged the Cambodian Government to take immediate measures to ensure the safety of foreign nationals and their properties in the country.

Acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said he had asked Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to discuss with his Asean counterparts developments in Cambodia.

"They will discuss developments in Cambodia (at Thursday's meeting) but not necessarily to defer its entry into Asean. They will decide what to do," he said.

Anwar said he had consulted with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on the latest developments in Cambodia.

Abdullah, who is chairman of the grouping's standing committee, said Asean was dismayed and regretted the unfortunate turn of events in Cambodia, "which has resulted in the loss of innocent lives, both of Cambodian citizens and foreigners".

In a statement issued here, Abdullah also called on Ranariddh and Hun Sen, to resolve their differences peacefully.

"We urge both to abide by the terms of the Paris peace accords," he said, adding that the Cambodian people had suffered from conflicts for the past two decades.

"It would be tragic for the conflict to re-ignite in a country that has long suffered from war," he said.

Stressing that Asean would continue to monitor closely the situation in Cambodia, he said the special meeting of the Foreign Ministers on Thursday would review all aspects of the situation.

The Foreign Ministers had, at a special meeting on May 31, decided to accept Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar into the grouping. They were to be formally ushered in at the Ministerial Meeting here from July 21 to 29.

Asean currently comprises Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Fighting erupted between Hun Sen's forces and those loyal to First Prime Minister Ranariddh in Phnom Penh on Saturday.

Hun Sen announced the following day that Ranariddh, who was in France when the fighting broke out, was no longer the country's First Premier. Looting and violence has gripped the capital since.

Singapore also expressed deep concern about the deterioration of the

situation in Cambodia, stressing that it disapproved of the change of government through violent means.

Its Ministry of Foreign Affairs was monitoring the recent developments very closely.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas declined to say whether the on-going fighting in Cambodia would affect its planned admission to Asean.

"I do not want to say anything before the Foreign Ministers make a decision." In Bangkok, Thai Foreign Minister Prachuab Chaiyasarn said it was too early to say whether Asean would reverse its decision.

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