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Thanat-Asean

TOUGH TIMES AHEAD FOR ASEAN, WARNS THANAT KHOMAN

By: Tan Hock Guan

SINGAPORE, Aug 4 (Bernama) -- Confrontations over a currency speculator and over a call to review the human rights charter at the recent Asean ministerial meeting are "ominous signs" that the future is far from rosy for the regional grouping, says one of its founding members.

"The confrontation over the currency speculator is regrettable. Thailand has lost to this speculator, said Tun Dr Thanat Khoman, a former Thai Deputy Prime Minister.

The speculator should not be called a "rogue" but a "philanthropist" instead as he had helped enrich a world superpower at the expense of the poor South East Asian nations, he said.

Dr Thanat, one of the signatories of the Bangkok Declaration leading to the formation of Asean in 1967, said this in his keynote address at the Asean Roundtable 1997 jointly organised by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Singapore) and the Asean Secretariat.

He questioned why US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had to staunchly defend George Soros, the alleged currency speculator, against charges advanced by Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"The defence was quite rough and sustained and the lady had to bring in all the big guns to explain that just one man could not do it and that he was not acting alone," he said.

Dr Thanat said the confrontation over the call to review the human rights charter was "even more intense".

He said the deprivation of human freedom which characterise colonialism would disqualify colonial powers from being supporters of human rights and rank them as violators.

He added that those who did not wish Asean well should know that Asean was still willing to work and cooperate with them for mutual benefit.

Earlier, Singapore Foreign Minister Prof S Jayakumar, in his keynote address, said Asean could not take for granted that it would succeed and that it faced many serious challenges in the years ahead.

He said Asean, following its expansion with the inclusion of Laos and Myanmar, had to find a new internal equilibrium.

Prof Jayakumar said if Asean maintained its record of playing a role in contributing to peace and prosperity in the region, its standing in the international community would be enhanced and there would be an increase in its influence and bargaining power. -- BERNAMA

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