

15 DEC 1998

Asean-Cambodia

ASEAN TO HOLD SPECIAL CEREMONY TO ADMIT CAMBODIA

HANOI, Dec 15 (Bernama) -- Leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) attending their sixth summit meeting here have agreed to admit Cambodia as the grouping's 10th member.

They have instructed their foreign ministers to organise a special admission ceremony here, said Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai.

The decision would realise a vision of an Asean-10 (encompassing all the 10 countries in the region), he said when opening the summit here today.

Asean presently comprises Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

"Following an open exchange of views, the Asean leaders come to the decision to admit Cambodia as the tenth member of Asean," he said.

Khai, however, did not say when the special ceremony to admit Cambodia would take place.

The leaders discussed Cambodia's admission during their informal dinner here last night but could not agree to admit Phnom Penh at their two-day summit here.

The date for the special ceremony for Cambodia's admission has yet to be fixed but according to one Asean official, it would be held in two to four weeks' time.

Khai said Cambodia's admission would enhance Asean's strength and international standing and contribute to strengthening peace, increasing cooperation and promoting development in Southeast Asia.

"This is the last Asean summit in this century as we make preparations to bring Asean onto the new millennium.

"It also marks an important step in the development of our association and is the first summit that reflects in reality the vision of an Asean embracing the whole Southeast Asian region, an association of Southeast Asia, by Southeast Asia, and for Southeast Asia," he said.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in his opening statement said Malaysia welcomed Cambodia's membership of Asean.

In his opening statement Indonesian President B J Habibie had similar words. He said Indonesia warmly welcomed Phnom Penh to the Asean family as a full member.

"With all 10 countries of Southeast Asia within the Asean fold, the vision of our founding fathers of a united Southeast Asia at peace with itself and with the rest of the world has been fulfilled," Habibie said.

Habibie said Asean has achieved full strength at a time when it needed all the vigour that it could muster.

-- BERNAMA

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