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Myanmar-Abdullah

MYANMAR SAYS YES TO REGIONAL CURRENCIES FOR INTRA-ASEAN TRADE

By: Syed Jamil Jaafar

YANGON, March 10 (Bernama) -- Myanmar has agreed to and is keen in taking part in a Malaysia-initiated scheme for intra-Asean trade using regional currencies to deal with the current economic setbacks.

Her endorsement of the scheme was conveyed by Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) Senior General Than Shwe to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during their talks here yesterday.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi told Malaysian journalists that Dr Mahathir enlightened Than Shwe on measures being taken to implement a resolution of the Asean heads of government to boost regional trade employing the new mechanism.

Abdullah said Myanmar was also prepared to engage in barter trading with Malaysia.

"Myanmar offers Malaysia an array of products especially foodstuffs while Malaysia in turn offers goods which Myanmar would want to have but could not buy for lack of funds," said Abdullah.

"As such barter trade is practicable," he said.

He said Dr Mahathir and Than Shwe concurred on enhancing cooperation among Asean member countries in dealing with the region's troubled economies and depreciating currencies.

Myanmar and Laos joined Asean last July. The other seven members of the grouping are Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Dr Mahathir offered training facilities for Myanmar's field officers given the country's focus on agricultural development.

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir conveyed to Myanmar's leadership his views that tolerance was crucial for inter-racial relations.

Based on Malaysia's own experience being a multi-racial nation like Myanmar, upholding religious tolerance was also necessary.

"We are aware that Myanmar is working towards bringing about changes and the Prime Minister expressed the hope that the process could be expedited," he said.

Myanmar said such process was on-going despite odds and obstacles especially pertaining to power-sharing between the various ethnic groups, some of which were still engaged in insurgency.

Dr Mahathir also expressed to the Myanmar leadership his view that a country could not shield itself from the opinions and criticisms of others.

"The prime minister said while it is our right to run our own country, at times we also have to take into account the practices and norms already accepted by the international community," said Abdullah.

On Muslim Rohingya refugees in Malaysia, Abdullah said Than Shwe agreed to send an official to Malaysia to identify those who claimed to be Myanmar nationals but have no documentary proof.

Malaysia has asked Myanmar to accept back these refugees and immigrants who are without documents. -- BERNAMA

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