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Mahathir-Cambodia

DR MAHATHIR HAPPY WITH DEVELOPMENTS IN CAMBODIA

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 4 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has told his Cambodian counterpart Hun Sen that he is happy that Cambodia now has a stable and cohesive government and is moving towards achieving national reconciliation.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Dr Mahathir also hoped that Cambodia would establish a Senate to facilitate its formal entry into Asean.

Syed Hamid was briefing reporters at the Prime Minister's Department after bilateral talks between Dr Mahathir and Hun Sen who arrived here earlier today for a three-day official visit.

Hun Sen informed Dr Mahathir that he was moving in that direction according to the process and mechanism prevalent in Cambodia to realise its desire to be part of Asean, said Syed Hamid.

"The onus is on the Cambodian side to inform us (Asean foreign ministers) when they have already established a Senate," Syed Hamid said.

"As soon as we are made aware of the formation of the senate then I think the Asean foreign ministers will meet to sign the formal agreement on the admission.

"I don't think we operate on deadlines over the matter," Syed Hamid said.

At last December's Asean summit in Hanoi, Asean leaders agreed in principle to admit Cambodia as the grouping's 10th member and instructed their foreign ministers to arrange a special admission ceremony for Cambodia at an appropriate time in the near future.

It had been decided that the proposed ceremony would also be held in the Vietnamese capital.

Some Asean members insisted that Cambodia would have to first fulfil the requisites for a new coalition government, including the establishment of a senate, before it joins Asean.

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

During the two-hour talks, both sides also discussed measures to step up bilateral relations between Phnom Penh and Kuala Lumpur, said Syed Hamid describing the talks as "most productive".

Dr Mahathir pledged that Malaysia would look into Cambodia's request for training in industry, foreign policy, oil and gas as well as agriculture, among others, Syed Hamid said.

He said Cambodia also asked for Malaysia's assistance in establishing water resources, including building dams and water catchment areas and also for credit to finance such endeavours.

Syed Hamid said Cambodia would like to see Malaysian involvement in rural development projects.

Malaysia agreed to look into the possibility of importing Cambodian maize, rice, soya bean and cattle during certain seasons, he said.

He said Malaysia would also try to maintain its position as the largest foreign investor in Cambodia despite facing problems due to the current regional economic downturn.

Malaysian investments in Cambodia up to December last year amounted to RM1.7 billion or 31 per cent of the total foreign direct investment there.

The investments were in infrastructure development, power generation, tourism, banking, property development, oil refining and production,

education and telecommunications.

Syed Hamid said it was also mentioned during the talks that Japan had agreed to work with Malaysia in providing assistance to developing countries such as Cambodia.

"Malaysia is keen to enhance its relationship with Cambodia. And with Hun Sen's update that stability is growing in his country and that there is a process of national integration, we believe that this development can only benefit Cambodia," he said.

Immediately after their talks Dr Mahathir and Hun Sen also witnessed the signing of a Malaysia-Cambodia Trade Agreement to further expand their trade, economic and industrial ties.

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