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Cambodia-Senate

FORMATION OF SENATE IS CAMBODIA'S INTERNAL AFFAIR, SAYS HUN SEN

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 5 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Hun Sen said today the formation of the Cambodian senate, a prerequisite stipulated by Asean for Cambodia's entry into the nine-member grouping, is his country's internal affair.

"The setting up of the senate is not to please Asean but to please the Cambodian people," he said during a question and answer session after giving a lecture on "Cambodia: Towards a New Future" at a function organised by the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations, here.

Hun Sen, who did not give a timeframe as to when the senate would be set up, said in jest: "If setting up a senate is like opening an entertainment club, it will take us about five hours."

He said Asean's insistence that Cambodia should establish a senate before joining the exclusive regional club might be seen by certain people as interference in other country's affairs.

The principal of non-interference was the very point which attracted Cambodia to Asean in the first place, he said.

At last December's Asean summit in Hanoi, Asean leaders agreed in principle to admit Cambodia as the grouping's 10th member subject to the country meeting the requirements.

They instructed their foreign ministers to arrange a special admission ceremony for Cambodia at an appropriate time in the near future and also decided that the proposed ceremony be held also in the Vietnamese capital.

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

Hun Sen, who became prime minister in November last year, described his visit to Malaysia as "very important".

He said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had been paying great attention to Cambodia and that Malaysia's support for his country had a high political value.

Earlier in his speech, Hun Sen said development and economy were the priorities of his government and the primary aspiration of the Cambodian people as a whole.

He said the defection and return to the fold of the nation by the former head of state of the Khmer Rouge regime, Khieu Samphan, and former National Assembly president, Nuon Chea, indicated that the national reconciliation had reached its final stage.

During the Khmer Rouge 1975-1979 reign of terror, more than three million Cambodians died from starvation, forced labour and execution.

"This horror has come to an end and a new era has begun in Cambodia. The results of the July 1998 election are the products of democracy, the fruit born by the great efforts of the Cambodian people with their own will," he said.

Hun Sen ends his three-day official visit to Malaysia tomorrow.

--BERNAMA

MAM AHH ABG