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Mahathir-meetings

ASEAN MEMBERS SHOULD BE ACCEPTABLE TO ALL, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: Abdul Rahman Ahmad

SINGAPORE, Nov 24 (Bernama) -- Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Asean wants its three new members namely Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar to be allowed to attend international meetings and be accepted by all.

"This is something we want to do. At the moment Asean appears as if it has broken up by this act of leaving out the three countries from attending international meetings.

"They were left out in the Asia-Europe meeting (Asem) and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) forum meeting. At the meeting (Asem), on the other hand all the EU members were present," he said.

Dr Mahathir told reporters this after separate bilateral meetings here today with his Chinese counterpart Zhu Rongji and Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai who are attending the fourth Asean informal summit here today.

Dr Mahathir said that at the informal summit the Asean leaders discussed non-acceptance of the three Asean members by other international groupings.

The three Asean members excluded from Asem are Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.

Already the Asean-EU ministerial meeting has fallen casualty to the EU's stance since Myanmar join Asean in 1997.

Although the meeting is scheduled to reconvene in Laos next month for the first time since then there is still doubt whether it would be a full-fledged Asean-EU ministerial level meeting.

The Asem currently comprises seven Asean countries, China, South Korea and Japan on the Asian side while the European bloc is made up of 15 EU members and the European Commission.

Dr Mahathir said the Asean leaders wanted the 10-member regional grouping to remain identified as Asean as a whole.

The leaders resented the idea that some Asean members are acceptable to other groups while the others are not, he said.

"We want to attend international meetings as Asean, even in Asem and Apec meetings. We must be a full complement of Asean," Dr Mahathir added.

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

-- BERNAMA

ARA RYN