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Unctad-Asean

ASEAN WAY MAY BE HIGHLIGHTED AT UNCTAD X

By: Muin Abdul Majid

BANGKOK, Feb 9 (Bernama) -- Asean may send a message to other developing countries attending the 10th session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Unctad X) that "it pays to befriend your neighbours politically and economically".

In an article written for The Nation newspaper today, Pana Janviroj said that despite differences of opinion among Asean members, most now derived their growth evenly from intra-regional trade.

"Asean has demonstrated the value of its pact, despite the diverseness of political systems, culture and traditions.

"It has elements that African, Middle East or South American nations can easily copy," he said.

Janviroj said the effort would be worthwhile because all kinds of issues that developing countries had feared and expressed through previous Unctad meetings were in many ways dealt with pragmatically and without ideological obsession by Asean.

The issues included dependency, technology transfer, self-reliance and dominations by transnational corporations.

"But the Asean members must be frank and tell them that the grouping could have done better had they not at the outset seen each other as competitors but as partners to capitalise on their strengths together," he said.

Janviroj said that if Unctad X was to be meaningful, any grand vision for the world and stone-throwing political rhetoric should be done away with.

"Get down to the basics of how each member country can trade with one another," he added. Asean groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has indicated that he would attend the UN gathering to highlight the reservations of developing countries on the effects of globalisation.

Some 3,000 delegates from Unctad 190 member countries are expected to attend the Feb 12-19 rendezvous in the Thai capital where the government has reportedly assigned more than 6,000 policemen to enforce security at the conference and another 1,100 officers entrusted to provide protection for VIPs.

Meanwhile, Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai said Unctad X had set itself the goal of arriving at a consensus on development strategies that will help to ensure mutually beneficial and equitable growth for all countries and all people.

At the flag-hoisting ceremony for Unctad X today, he said to do so, the conference would have to address the concerns being felt in both developed and developing countries -- be they about the impact of globalisation, environmental preservation or the widening gap between rich and poor countries.

In a press briefing delivered at the Unctad headquarters in Geneva, the body's secretary-general Rubens Ricupero said that the meeting could advance a "healing process" that would help trade negotiations regain momentum.

He was referring to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting which derailed in Seattle late last year due to inflexibility of member countries on sticky issues as well as protests by various non-governmental

organisations.
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