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Call for equality for Asean reps at meetings

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said all Asean members should be treated equally at international forums and must be given the opportunity to participate in them.

Speaking to reporters at the end of the Asean+3 meeting, Dr Mahathir said leaders attending the meeting were of the opinion that Asean members should not be differentiated in any way.

Dr Mahathir was making obvious reference to the scheduled Asia-Europe Ministerial Meeting in Vientiane next month which the European Union feels should not be participated by Myanmar.

They also feel that Cambodia and Laos should not participate because they had only recently become members of Asean and were not the original signatories to the Asean-European Economic Co-operation Agreement in 1981.

"When we attend meetings, we want to attend as an Asean grouping. At the moment, Asean appears to be broken up because Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia are being left out.

"On the other hand, all the European Union members are participating," he said.

On the Trans-Asia Railway link, Dr Mahathir said all countries were supportive of the idea including China, Japan and South Korea.

However, he said the rail link between Singapore and Kunming was only relevant to countries in the mainland.

"But countries like Brunei, the Philippines and Indonesia who are not in the mainland would also like to be integrated.

"As such we are now looking at upgrading our sea and river transportation system to integrate these countries," he said.

A Malaysian proposal that all Asean countries strive to improve the command of the English language was accepted by all at the summit.

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