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Asean-Terrorism (WrapUp)

DR MAHATHIR PLAYS EFFECTIVE STEERING ROLE AT ASEAN SUMMIT

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BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, Nov 7 (Bernama) -- Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad played an effective steering role in persuading fellow Asean member countries to draw up a framework of action to combat rising terrorism in the region.

Asean officials said Dr Mahathir spoke strongly on terrorism and the United States' attacks on Afghanistan on three occasions during the Seventh Asean Leaders' Summit which ended here yesterday.

Without Dr Mahathir's persuasion and his concern over the plight of the civilian casualties in Afghanistan, the framework on terrorism devised by Asean would not have been so comprehensive, said an official involved in drafting the declaration.

Asean leaders did not jointly ask the US to immediately stop the bombings in Afghanistan nevertheless Malaysia and Indonesia did criticise the bombings.

Malaysia came to the summit to campaign on two issues -- terrorism and the fight against the increasing number of HIV/Aids cases in the region, besides pushing for intra-Asean trade and economic integration with China, Japan and South Korea.

Malaysia also pushed for Asean to call for an international seminar on terrorism to define and identify terrorists and for a halt to US attacks on Afghanistan which had resulted in civilians casualties.

Soon after his arrival at the Brunei capital on Sunday, Dr Mahathir went straight into the summit's working dinner hosted by Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah and reiterated Malaysia's consistent stand against terrorism and the US bombing of Afghanistan.

"Although countries have their own respective views on both the issues, he managed to move the hearts of the leaders," said an official.

That same night, the leaders endorsed the 2001 Asean Declaration On Joint Action To Counter Terrorism and rejected any attempt to link terrorism with any religion or race.

Dr Mahathir amplified Malaysia's stand again the following day at the summit proper and at the end of the day, Malaysia scored a major success.

He spoke about the ineffectiveness of attacking Afghanistan which had resulted in the death of innocent people including children and that there had been no evidence as yet of the Taliban or the people responsible for the Sept 11 attacks being captured or killed.

Summit chairman, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, issued a statement later which among others called for a multilateral seminar on emergency response to terrorist threat, combat terrorism in a comprehensive manner, define terrorism and identify its root causes.

The Asean leaders adopted the statement which expressed concern over the welfare of innocent people as a result of military action against Afghanistan and considered extending humanitarian assistance.

"There were some differences in our views on terrorism. I felt air strikes should stop immediately in Afghanistan but others did not express strong views," said Dr Mahathir before heading for home yesterday.

"However, I am happy with the outcome of the summit," he added.

"Some do not want to burn bridges with the United States especially Singapore and the Philippines due to economic implications and are more concerned over domestic economic woes," said an Asean delegate who declined to be quoted.

He said Dr Mahathir managed to persuade Asean leaders to support the seminar on terrorism and a Special Asean Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime, focusing on terrorism, will be held in Kuala Lumpur next April.

Despite the lack of a collective response against US bombings, Malaysia was "man enough" to ask the world's super military power -- the United States-- to stop its actions in Afghanistan.

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