

Asean sec-gen in glowing tribute to Dr M

STAR - 3 NOV 2007

PHNOM PENH: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is attending his final Asean summit here, received a glowing tribute from Asean secretary-general Rodolfo Severino.

Describing him as the driving force in Asean, Severino said he had known Dr Mahathir for a long time and had great respect for the Prime Minister.

"He has a very clear idea of what is good for his country and the necessary backbone to carry out the policies that are good for his country. He has shown the capacity to exercise leadership in a country which has much potential," he said here yesterday at the sidelines of the senior officials meeting.

In Asean, Malaysia had the most open trading policies and had been in the forefront of Asean co-operation from the beginning, he said.

Asked by an Australian jour-

nalist why Dr Mahathir was opposed to Australia joining the grouping, Severino said that Asean was limited to South-East Asian countries.

"I don't know why you say Dr Mahathir is opposed to the expansion of Asean. He was one

of the primary moving forces in bringing in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam," he added.

Asked whether Dr Mahathir would go along with a meeting with Australia, like the forthcoming Asean summit with India, Severino said he did not know about Australia as no decision had been made.

"But certainly, the one with India will happen in a few days. It is an indication of Asean countries reaching out to their neighbours," he added.

Severino criticised countries which had issued advisories to their citizens not to travel to the South-East Asian region.

"Such advisories have an impact on tourism and economic growth in the region. Why, when the Sept 11 attacks occurred, there were no such advisories; what about Moscow after the hostage situation?" he asked.