

10 SEP 2002

RAFIDAH-ASEM

ASEM DEVIATING FROM ORIGINAL OBJECTIVES, SAYS RAFIDAH

By: Mikhail Raj Abdullah

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 10 (Bernama) -- The Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem), the informal process of dialogue and cooperation aimed at bringing the two continents closer together established in 1996 in Bangkok, is deviating from its original objectives, International Trade and Industry Minister, Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, said today.

She said that there were too many proposals being mooted by the experts and eminent persons group, but none has so far been operationalised or put into practise.

Besides this, Europe was harping on including contentious political as well as human rights issues to the extent of preventing meaningful discourse to advance bilateral economic linkages between the continents, she told a media briefing here.

Asem is an informal process of dialogue and cooperation bringing together 15 European Union members and the European Commission with 10 Asian countries, namely Brunei, China, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

The inaugural summit was first held in Bangkok in 1996, followed by the second in London in 1998 and the third in South Korea in 2000.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is expected to attend the next summit in Copenhagen, Denmark, between Sept 21-24, 2002.

Rafidah said: "There is nothing concrete as far as economic cooperation is concerned and yet the EU wants to include political issues."

Hosts Denmark is working closely with Malaysia, Singapore and Ireland on a proposal to effect life-long learning among its citizens.

She said that the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) forum too at one time was deviating from its original objectives but some developing countries including Malaysia managed to help steer it back to the economic path.

Likewise, she said that Asem should revert to its original objectives and preserve to enhance bilateral trade and investment as well as reduce obstacles to trade and investment. -- BERNAMA

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