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Razali: Asean not doing enough to face globalisation

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BANGI, Thurs. - Asean, touted as a group of nations that is most ethnically, religiously and economically diverse in the world, may not be doing enough to adapt to the changes of globalisation.

United Nations secretary-general's special envoy for Myanmar, Tan Sri Razali Ismail, said at present, Asean countries seemed to be more interested in pushing individual national agendas and were only projecting what each country wants to do regionally in dealing with the issue.

"In listening to what has been said, it sounds more like we are trying to outdo and compete with each other, rather than come up with a strategy."

He said at present, there was no regional strategy for a comprehensive approach by Asean governments.

"I am not sure if Asean is ready to deal with globalisation," said Razali, who is also special adviser to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said perhaps other nations preferred not to be completely consolidated regionally, and chose to deal with competition singularly.

"Maybe there is a regional effort to consolidate by political leadership but I'm not so sure it's happening in the private sector," he said.

Razali was presenting a public lecture on the "Significance of Asean to Malaysia in Engaging Globalisation" at the Southeast Asian scholars and public intellectuals (Seaf) fellowship programme.

"The best way for small nations to preserve their independence is to be bound together in a like-minded group," he added.

He said the financial crisis from 1997 to 1998 saw some governments ill-prepared in dealing with the meltdown and the whole globalisation process.

"In the new environment, leaders must earn the right to rule and not just expect to rule," he said.

He added that China should not be viewed as a threat as its markets could present Malaysia with new opportunities to learn and improve itself.

"For example, statistics have shown that over the next 10 years, the demand for vehicles in China will number some six million, and four million for Asean nations, which will provide huge opportunities," he told the gathering.

In his opening speech, Tan Sri Awang Had Salleh said political globalisation has brought about a greater sense of freedom in human rights and democracy but could threaten the stability and sovereignty of countries, including Malaysia.

Institute of Malaysian and International Studies (Ikmas) director Prof Ragayah Mat Zin said that various regions in the world had to respond to an unprecedented rate of change and transformation, processes which were part of globalisation.

She said in facing these challenges, Asean members have to understand that they cannot avoid being transformed or remain being a victim of forces beyond its control.

She said economic globalisation has brought about a global economy where investments can move to any place which was suitable and most profitable.

China, with its huge market and cheap labour, has emerged as one of the hottest places today, she said.

"Malaysia, with its population of 23 million, cannot match China's market potential, but if it were to combine with Asean, it would have a

market of 500 million people to give China a run for its money in attracting foreign investments," she added.