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Mahathir-Asean

NO PLACE IN THE WORLD IS SAFE FROM TERRORISM, SAYS DR M

PHNOM PENH, Nov 5 (Bernama) - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today no country in the world, no matter how well protected, is safe from terrorism.

At a press conference at the end of the 8th Asean summit here before flying home, the Prime Minister questioned why travel advisories were issued by several governments against certain countries only.

He was responding to a question from an Australian journalist on why the travel advisories should be lifted.

"I think Australia is unsafe as the other Asean countries. In fact, at the moment, Australia is particularly unsafe for Muslims because they are likely to have their houses raided.

"I have seen pictures of doors being broken which I don't think is essential. So, people are today exposed to danger wherever they may be," he said.

Dr Mahathir and his Asean colleagues were upset over travel warnings by several western countries including Australia, Germany and the United States to avoid Southeast Asia in the wake of the Bali bombings in Indonesia that killed more than 180 people, mostly foreigners.

The Asean leaders, in a special declaration, asked the international community not to indiscriminately issue such warnings without substantial proof and should instead support the 10-member Asean grouping in combating terrorism.

"If you have to have a travel warning, you have a travel warning to everybody. Don't travel, don't fly because your plane might be used as a missile to crash into a building.

So, why single out some countries?" he said.

Dr Mahathir said following Thailand's move to join Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Cambodia to exchange information, among others, to curb terrorism, Asean now had a good network but he cautioned that it was not foolproof because fighting terrorism was like fighting an invisible enemy.

On the outcome of the two-day summit, Dr Mahathir said overall it was positive.

"I think this is a very good meeting. We were able to discuss what we should be doing together, whether we should expand our contacts with our countries," he said.

He said Asean also had good offers from China, South Korea and Japan for economic cooperation that included the formation of free trade areas (FTA) that would eventually lead to an East Asia free trade zone.

He said Asean's fortunes had turned around since the 1997 financial crisis and far from being written off, the region is now being wooed by many countries to become economic partners.

"I think Asean will emerge more important in the world economy," he said.

On the proposed Asean-China FTA scheduled for 2010, Dr Mahathir said Asean countries would have to manage both the benefits and disadvantages of granting access to China which has competitive labour cost.

Dr Mahathir said there might be an exclusion list of sensitive products in sectors where China could push Asean out of some industries.

He also described China's participation in the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea as "very assuring" for countries

in the region.

Asked on his views on an Asean-Australia summit, Dr Mahathir said some Asean leaders felt that it should be studied more closely and until then he had no further comment on the matter.

-- BERNAMA

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