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APEC-MYANMAR

ASEAN COUNTRIES AGAINST DISCUSSING MYANMAR AT APEC

By: Arul Rajoo

BANGKOK, Oct 19 (Bernama) -- The seven Asean countries in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) is steadfast that any issue on Myanmar should not be discussed during the 11th Apec Leaders' meeting tomorrow.

Thailand Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra said Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam felt that Apec should only concentrate on economic cooperation among its 21 members.

Myanmar is not an economic issue. Asean's stand is it (Myanmar) should not be discussed here as Myanmar is not economic related, he told reporters after an Asean-7 leaders working luncheon hosted by him here.

The leaders, including Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Indonesian President, Megawati Sukarnoputri, are here to attend the two-day Apec Leaders' meeting.

Thaksin said that the stand was made in view of the calls from the United States and several of its allies which want Southeast Asian countries to put more pressure on Myanmar's military rulers to release detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Founded in 1989, the Apec has been largely devoted to promoting trade and economic growth in the Pacific rim. But there has been call by several leaders, including US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, for the Myanmar issue to be discussed during the meeting.

Powell had also urged the Apec ministerial meeting to play a greater role in the fight against terrorism, although there were resistance from several countries, including Malaysia, which felt Apec should stick to its original objective of promoting trade cooperation and leave security matters to other international forums like the United Nations Security Council.

On the move by US to expand Apec's agenda to various issues, including security and terrorism, Thaksin said "we are in the opinion it should be confined to Apec's original goal. Anything to do with terrorism is not related to this objective, unless it affects the economy."

He said that Apec should concentrate on expanding economic issues and facilitation of trade among member countries.

On calls from some Thai officials that the Bogor Goal of achieving trade liberalisation among developing countries in Apec be expedited, Thaksin said that Asean countries would not push towards that.

"We will not push for earlier dates. But I am impressed that many countries are clinching free trade agreements, this will help in reducing trade barriers earlier than 2020," he added. -- BERNAMA

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