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Hamid-Tribute

ASEAN'S 'SURPRISE' TRIBUTE AN HONOUR FOR PM, SAYS SYED HAMID

By: Salbiah Said & Openg Onn

NUSA DUA, (Bali) Oct 5 (Bernama) -- The "surprise" tribute for Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad from the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) at the Leaders' Summit on Tuesday, has been described as an honour for the Malaysian premier and the nation.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the tribute organised by Indonesia, which currently holds the ASEAN chair, and host of the Ninth ASEAN Summit in Bali, was intended to be a surprise for Dr Mahathir.

"It is not supposed to be announced. The intention is to be a surprise for PM. I don't know how to handle this," he told a media conference here today.

Hamid was taken by surprise when asked on the tribute, which is contained in the programme for the Malaysian media covering the Ninth ASEAN Summit and other related meetings from Oct 5 to 8 here.

On the schedule, Indonesian President Megawati Soekarnoputri will pay tribute and present a memento to Dr Mahathir after the signing of the historic ASEAN charter known as the Bali Concord II.

The Bali Concorde II, or the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II, will reinforce the three main pillars of economic integration, security and social development, in a move which is expected to bind the grouping more tightly together.

The new charter refers to an ASEAN community with "three pillars": the ASEAN Economic Community, the ASEAN Security Community and the ASEAN Social and Cultural Community.

"To us it is not only an honour for the PM in his personal capacity, but also an honour for our country," said Syed Hamid, noting that this is the first time that ASEAN members are organising the special event for Dr Mahathir, who retires end of this month.

"I think a lot of things the PM has done, he is not profiling himself, but he has profiled to Malaysia in a way that will allow us to continue with his legacy, in a way that we are confident and able to place ourselves in a very good position in whatever our undertakings are," he said.

He also expressed Malaysia's heartfelt appreciation for host Indonesia for organising the event, declining to go into detail, but noted that this would be the first time an ASEAN leader, is being given such a reception, although he is leaving office.

The special occasion, to be held during the ASEAN leaders Summit, would be an opportunity for Dr Mahathir to thank his friends and colleagues, and for them to honour him for his contribution and leadership within the ASEAN community, said Syed Hamid.

Dr Mahathir, he said, had always been seen as a proactive leader, noting that the premier had contributed ideas that were 'implementable'. ASEAN's Vision 2020, ASEAN's caring society and prosper-thy-neighbour concepts, had all originated from Dr Mahathir, he said.

Another example is the East Asian Economic Community, an idea which has been accepted by member nations. "The idea originated from KL. When we wanted an East Asia idea, nobody wanted to accept, so we came up with a creative idea of ASEAN+3," he said.

"There must be a unit that focuses on East Asian activities (within ASEAN). Otherwise, it will be too general," said Syed Hamid.

"Dr Mahathir, whether he is respected for his views, is seen as

principled and consistent. His position has always been consistent ...to contribute to the betterment of ASEAN," he added.

Citing Dr Mahathir's ideas, which included the Mekong and Ganga Growth Triangles, Syed Hamid noted that the Malaysian premier "has a cooperative spirit" and that "he can accommodate views even though people think he is tough."

Dr Mahathir, 77, who has been in power since 1981, stunned the nation with a resignation announcement in June last year.

He later agreed to continue to helm the government till October this year to ensure a smooth and orderly transition of power to his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

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