

ASEAN: High expectation on Tun Dr Mahathir

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From M. Saraswathi

SINGAPORE, Nov 11 (Bernama) -- ASEAN has high expectation on Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's leadership as the regional grouping gathers for its 33rd Summit at a time of geopolitical and economic changes.

"He is the most senior leader in ASEAN. There are lots of expectations for him to play some kind of leadership role in some issues. We have been hearing this from some of the informal talks," Foreign Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah said.

However, the minister was tight lipped when asked if the issues would include how ASEAN would deal with the rift between China and the United States as reported.

"There are a couple of areas. But off course we are not in the position to say more than that," he told Malaysian media gathered here at the island city ahead of the ASEAN Summit on Nov 11 to 15.

This is Dr Mahathir's first official visit to Singapore since becoming the Prime Minister for the second time after Malaysia's historic general election on May 9. It is also the first ASEAN Summit he will be attending after 15 years. Last month, he attended the ASEAN Leaders Gathering in Bali, Indonesia.

Saifuddin said Dr Mahathir was also expected to touch upon issues with regards to ASEAN solidarity, economic growth and trade.

At the ASEAN Leaders Gathering last month, the prime minister lamented that ASEAN was not fully tapping its potential as an economic powerhouse despite having abundant resources and a consumer market of nearly 700 million people.

He also called on the 10-member grouping to get rid of suspicious feelings to enable the group to adhere to the principle of “prosper thy neighbour”.

At the Summit, ASEAN leaders are expected to adopt the ASEAN Smart Cities Framework and take stock of ASEAN’s achievements this year in strengthening ASEAN’s resilience and innovation.

“The ASEAN leaders, together with their counterparts from other Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) participating countries, are expected to discuss the progress of the RCEP negotiations at the Second RCEP Summit,” Singapore Prime Minister's Office said in a statement.

The ASEAN Leaders will also exchange views on regional and international issues with their counterparts at the 21st ASEAN Plus Three Summit; 13th East Asia Summit; Working Lunch hosted by Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong for ASEAN Leaders and Guests of the ASEAN Chair; Summits with China, Japan, Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States; and Informal Breakfast Summits with Australia and India.

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