

# It is not easy to conclude RCEP - Dr Mahathir

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By Linda Khoo Hui Li

BANGKOK, Nov 3 (Bernama) -- Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said it is not easy to conclude the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) as it needs to reach an agreement by all 16-RCEP countries.

Dr Mahathir, who is leading a Malaysian delegation to the 35th ASEAN Summit here, said multilateral trade deal is not easy to conclude as it involves 16 participating countries.

“We need an agreement from all 16 countries...if one country demands something and we cannot accept it, then there will be no agreement.

“Multilateral or even bilateral is not easy. It is not just about being nice to each other or patting your back and saying I agree with what you said and you agree with what I said,” he told the Malaysian media here today when asked to comment on the conclusion of RCEP after the seven-year delay.

The RCEP is a multilateral trade agreement between the 10 member states of ASEAN -- Malaysia, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam -- and its six Free Trade Agreement (FTA) partners, namely China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and India.

The RCEP, which began in 2012, with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of US\$49.5 trillion, which makes up 39 per cent of the total global GDP, is set to be the world’ s largest trade pact when successfully concluded.

Meanwhile, Malaysian International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Darell Leiking said matters on the RCEP was generally brought up during the ASEAN-China and ASEAN-India Summit here today.

He added that only one country was still ‘not clear’ of its decision pending conclusion on some issues at home.

“Most of the terms for the RCEP have been finalised and concluded. Only one country with a ‘not clear’ decision...just wait for the leaders’ statement tomorrow,” he said.

It is believed the negotiations are still unable to come to terms in at least four outstanding chapters of the 20 chapters text, namely e-investment, e-commerce, rules of origin, and trade remedies.

Media reported hopes to finalize the trade deal following India’ s new demand.

During the ASEAN-India Summit, Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi did not mention

anything about the RCEP deal, but only on reviewing existing trade agreement between ASEAN and India.

Meanwhile, Dr Mahathir said China had given an undertaking that Beijing subscribed to peace in South China Sea.

“That is their undertaking. Any problem we have in South China Sea, it can be resolved through negotiations, certainly not through violence and war.

“I believe that they (China) will not take such acts (of violence) and other countries also will not be harsh on China.

“The problem now is that other countries (outside ASEAN), which are not friendly with China, are trying to provoke ASEAN member countries to join them and go against China.

“If there were violence and war, the victims will be ASEAN member countries and China,” he added.

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