Asean's economic growth to be at par with China, India by 2015: Mustapa

SINGAPORE, July 31 (Bernama) -- Come 2015, when the Asean Economic Community (AEC) is ready, the region's economic growth will be at par with China and India, says International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed.

Noting that the grouping has a bright future, Mustapa said, "We've to reform and achieve more by being more competitive and be looked at as a very productive production-based.

"We're gradually evolving into a single market. By 2015, when the Asean Economic Community is ready, I believe and I'm convinced, Asean will be a more competitive and most dynamic region in the world.

"In my view, in terms of economic potential and future, Asean has the similar growth potential as China and India," he said in his keynote address entitled "Dynamic Leadership and Sustainable Economic Development of Malaysia Vision 2020" at the 2012 Annual Asia Competitiveness Institute Conference here today.

The minister also participated in a question-and-answer session moderated by the Lee Kuan Yew (LKY) School Dean, Prof Kishore Mahbubani, after the keynote address.

The conference was jointly hosted by the Asia Competitiveness Institute (ACI) at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKY School) and National University of Singapore.

Also present was Malaysia's High Commissioner to Singapore Datuk Md Hussin Nayan.

Speaking to Bernama later, Mustapa said Asean ministers have been putting a lot of effort towards realising AEC.

He said Asean has to continue pushing for a set of uniform regulations such as for cross-border movement of goods which is still a problem in some member countries.

"We've been talking about that and what's important is that, in Asean, we're very frank, we share all the issues and what are the problems (at hand)," he said.

Mustapa said the AEM was established to protect Asean citizens and ease their fear of their business being "swallowed" by foreigners.

"This is why we've to develop the Asean Economic Community in 2015, hopefully with the AEC, there will be a greater Asean, we think as one.

"When we think as one, hopefully, the border issues, tariff barriers and connectivity will be reduced to take us (Asean) to the next level.

"By putting their houses in order in the midst of preparations for the AEC, Asean is going to be a big magnet for investors and visitors as it is ready.

"By that time, we'll be able to compete even more with countries like China and India," he said.

As a group, Mustapa said, "Our population is more than 600 million people compared to China and India which have 1.2 billion and 1.1 billion, respectively.

"In terms of GDP (gross domestic product), we're two trillion of the GDP in Asean," he said.

With the growth in 2015, "our market will become bigger," the minister said.

Mustapa said the growing middle-class in all the Asean countries was important for the market.

"It's a good base (but) we still have to do a lot more," he added.

The ACI conference was attended by about 250 participants, mainly leading academicians, private sector and government officials from Singapore and various countries including senior representatives from 33 Indonesian provinces.

Leading speakers at the conference include Tharman Shanmugam, the Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore, who is also the Minister for Finance and Minister for Manpower and Gita Wirjawan, Indonesia's Minister of Trade.

Malaysia's participation in this conference helped promote the government's initiatives to attract investments and...
to share the best practices with other countries in the region, both public and private sectors, that would help propel Malaysia to become a high income economy by 2020.

On the sidelines of the conference, Mustapa also had one-to-one meetings with various chief executive officers of major Singaporean and multinational companies to promote trade and investment in Malaysia.