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ASEAN ECONOMIC MINISTERS AGREE TO HAVE SPECIAL EAST ASIA PROGRAMM

By: Khairdzir Yunus

JAKARTA, Sept 12 (Bernama) -- The 28th Asean Economic Ministers' Meeting (AEM) here which also discussed the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) have agreed to set up special programmes for East Asia countries.

Minister of International Trade and Industry Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said the programmes included that for small and medium scale industries, technology transfer, and development of human resources.

She told Malaysian reporters after the meeting that Malaysia had also been asked to prepare the concept papers for the programme to be submitted to the Unofficial Meeting of Asean Economic Ministers in November.

EAEC, muted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, is not a trading block. It is an informal gathering of East Asian countries who share a common interest in trade and economic development for the region.

Rafidah said today's meeting also agreed to accept Malaysia's proposal that a study be held on the resolutions passed at the "Asean exhibition on Books for all," held in Kuala Lumpur recently to widen information flow and reading material among Asean countries.

She said the meeting had identified a number of obstacles preventing the flow of printed materials among Asean countries including that which involved tariffs and certain procedures.

"The meeting agreed that an indepth study of the resolutions passed be carried out by the Asean secretariat as well as by those invited to do so," she said.

She said the resolutions that could benefit Asean included a proposal to set up a collection centre for Asean books at all libraries, a catalogue of Asean books and materials printed in Asean, Asean book fair and translation of books and magazines.

"We want to promote Asean to the Asean people through the print media," she said.

On another matter, she said the Asean economic ministers today agreed on issues related to the time period for tariffs' reduction on sensitive agriculture materials, rice and sugar, involving Indonesia and the Philippines.

She said according to the agreement reached, Indonesia would reduce tariffs for the materials concerned in the year 2003 and end in 2010 with flexibility given to it to fix the final stage for the reduction.

Yesterday, the economic ministers who presided at the Asean Free Trade Area (Afta) Council meeting, agreed to submit the matter to the Asean secretariat for it to determine the methods to resolve the matter.

Prior to this there was a deadlock at the Senior Economic Officers' Meeting (SEOM) when Indonesia, supported by the Philippines, asked that the time period for the tariff reduction for the materials concerned to begin in 2010 and end in the year 2020.

The Afta Council is a body to supervise the implementation of free trade areas among Asean countries -- Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam -- towards the year 2003. --

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