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ASEM-ministers

ASIA, EUROPE AGREE TO WORK TOGETHER TO REBUILD BOSNIA

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

BANGKOK, March 1 (Bernama) -- Asian and European ministers, meeting here today on the sidelines of a landmark summit between the two regions, discussed wide-ranging topics on ways of working together, including in the reconstruction of war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Foreign Ministry Secretary-General Tan Sri Ahmad Kamil Jaafar said the Asian countries were keen to join the Europeans towards assisting Bosnia to rebuild and rehabilitate its country.

The Europeans on their part could play a role insofar as the Korea Energy Development Organisation (KEDO) was concerned, he said when briefing Malaysian reporters of the discussion by the ministers which would be continued tomorrow morning.

"This is the kind of cooperative efforts between the two regions on areas that require assistance both in Europe and in Asia," he said.

The ministers are here for their leaders' historic gathering -- the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) -- which kicked off today with the aim of fostering closer relations between the two dynamic regions.

The two-day meeting is being attended by leaders of 10 Asian countries comprising the Asean seven plus China, Japan and South Korea and the 15-member European Union (EU).

Apart from discussing ways to move ASEM forward, the ministers also touched on Asia's role in world politics, taking into account its active participation in international affairs, on the United Nations reform, environment, social responsibility and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons.

In this regard, mention was made that the Complete Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) should be concluded by the middle of the year, he said.

On security issues, reference was made to the Asean Regional Forum (ARF) and the Europeans said they wanted to play a more active role on security issues in this region. The EU is already part of the ARF.

Another topic that featured in the talks was landmines, a critical subject which is being debated "if not here in Asia, at least in Europe" following the destruction in Bosnia, Ahmad Kamil said.

While there were "thousands and thousands" of landmines in Bosnia at the moment and in Cambodia, even Malaysia had landmines that were planted during the Emergency, he said.

"I think people are becoming aware that perhaps attention should be given to the existence of landmines," he said.

As it is a serious issue, he said someone might be taking it up at the United Nations which may lead to the complete elimination in terms of production and sale of landmines.

Asked about the leaders-only summit, Ahmad Kamil said he was informed that the atmosphere was good and that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was quite happy with the meeting.

Dr Mahathir, a leader much sought by Asian and European journalists covering the meeting, is scheduled to hold a press conference tomorrow. -- Bernama

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