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Asia-Europe

MALAYSIA WANTS ASIA-EU MEETING TO BE A SUMMIT OF LEADERS

By: Abdul Rahman Ahmad

PHUKET, Jan 31 (Bernama) -- Malaysia wants the first-ever Asia-Europe (Asem) summit of 10 Asian and 15 European leaders in Bangkok on March 1 and 2 to be strictly a meeting of heads of government only.

Its Foreign Ministry Secretary-General, Tan Sri Ahmad Kamil Jaafar, said today a leaders' meeting, minus a ministerial meeting, would be more productive as they would be able to talk openly and frankly on a wide range of subjects.

He said this had been proven at previous Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) and Asean summits and there was no reason why the Asia-Europe summit could not be just as productive.

He said this in view of a European Union (EU) request that a parallel meeting be held at the ministerial level preceding the historic summit which will bring together leaders of this two high-growth regions of the world.

"This is our experience in Asean and if Asean could achieve results, I don't see why we cannot achieve similar results when Asia meets Europe," he told Malaysian journalists, here, prior to the senior officials meeting ahead of the informal Asian Foreign Ministers meeting on Friday.

However, to overcome the problem, he suggested that a ministerial-level meeting be held sometime before the summit and not at the summit proper.

The meeting of foreign ministers on this island resort, to be followed by a similar one among economic ministers in Chiangrai on Feb 15 and 16, is in preparation for the Asem summit.

The Asian group attending the summit -- the seven Asean members and China, Japan and South Korea -- had agreed that the summit would not involve ministerial-level meetings.

The EU comprises Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

"At the senior officials meeting tomorrow, we have to make the crucial decision, whether to have a leaders' summit or to include a ministerial meeting before that ... we should resolve this as we are running out of time, " Ahmad Kamil said.

He said although there was no specific agenda for the Asem summit, the leaders would be free to raise any issues they wanted, be it nuclear testing, nuclear disarmament or human rights.

"The meeting will pave the way for greater interaction between the leaders of the two regions ... it will not be a confrontational one," he said.

"It is up to them to forward any issue which they think is important to Europe and Asia, " he said when asked whether it was appropriate for Malaysia to raise the French nuclear testing during the summit.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, commenting on French president Jacques Chirac's announcement that France had completed its sixth and final nuclear test at Mururoa and Fangataufa Atolls, 1,200 km southeast of Tahiti, had said yesterday he would raise the matter at the summit.

Ahmad Kamil also said that in years to come, Asian and European leaders would come to understand each others' concerns and appreciate problems faced by others ... "this will also pave the way for greater cooperation between Asian and European leaders when dealing in global matters."

He said there were calls for follow-up meetings after the summit, which

could be carried out at reasonable intervals so that whatever decisions made at the summit could be implemented.

Acting Foreign Minister Datuk Abu Hassan Omar is expected to arrive here tomorrow for the two-day meeting. He is representing Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who is recuperating from a recent heart surgery. -- Bernama