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Abu Hassan-Europe

M'SIA HOPEFUL SUMMIT WILL TRIGGER GREATER EU'S INVOLVEMENT IN ASIA

By: Abdul Muin Abdul Majid

PHUKET, Feb 1 (Bernama) -- Malaysia hopes that the Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem) in Bangkok next month will trigger greater involvement of the European Union (EU) in Asia-Pacific's dynamism.

Acting Foreign Minister Datuk Abu Hassan Omar said today by so doing, Europe would further strengthen its economic and political ties with countries in this region.

"Under the new trade liberalisation order, we are opening up ourselves to different directions. Therefore, it's right to say Europe would like to look more eastward so as not to lose out on the enormous economic opportunities here," he told Malaysian reporters on his arrival here for the two-day informal Asian Foreign Ministers meeting. The meeting begins tomorrow to prepare the agenda for the historic summit.

He is representing Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi who is recuperating after undergoing a heart surgery recently.

Those attending are foreign ministers from the Asean, China, Japan and South Korea.

Asked about Malaysia's expectations of the summit, he said: "We hope the outcome will be very positive in terms of enhancing two-way trade and economic as well as political cooperation."

Abu Hassan, who is also Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister, said Malaysia had always advocated an open door policy with its trade as well as economically and politically.

On whether the leaders were going to discuss human rights and nuclear issues in Bangkok, he said the foreign ministers would discuss the agenda before advising their respective leaders.

Asked whether he received any specific instructions from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad regarding the summit, he said: "Basically we are looking at enhancing two-way trade and economic ties."

He added that there had been a lot of individual contacts between countries in Asia and Europe and the summit would lead the countries involved to explore areas of mutual interest on a multilateral basis.

Meanwhile, Thailand's Foreign Minister Kasem S. Kasemsri said he was very optimistic about the summit which would benefit both regions especially in trade and investment.

Singapore's Foreign Minister Professor S. Jayakumar, who also arrived here today, said preparatory work leading to the summit was going on smoothly. He expressed optimism that the summit would achieve much progress.

Twenty-five heads of governments, 10 from Asia and 15 from Europe, are expected to attend the Asem summit on March 1 and 2. -- Bernama