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Asean dialogue partners to be represented

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - All Asean dialogue partners will be sending representatives to attend the Asean Regional Forum and Post-Ministerial Conference here next week.

They include the United States' Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, although earlier speculation was rife that she would give the meet a miss.

The ARF and PMC will follow the Asean Ministerial Meeting which starts at the officials' level on Monday at the Sunway Lagoon Resort Hotel.

Cambodia's participation in the meeting remains uncertain, Foreign Ministry secretary-general Datuk Abdul Kadir Mohamad told a Press briefing today.

Kadir said with only a few days before the 30th Asean Ministerial Meeting, Cambodia, which was accorded observer status two years ago, had not indicated who would represent Phnom Penh.

"Until today, we have no confirmation on whether they are coming," he said.

"We hope to get a clearer picture by the time the Asean Foreign Ministers gather here."

Kadir said the Foreign Ministers might address the Cambodia issue during their formal meeting.

Cambodia, along with Myanmar and Laos, was scheduled to join the regional grouping next week but Asean Foreign Ministers at a special meeting on Thursday postponed its entry indefinitely in view of its political uncertainties.

Second Prime Minister Hun Sen ousted First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh earlier this month and said he wanted to arrest Ranariddh - who is in Paris - and put him on trial.

Fighting broke out between the two rival groups, forcing hundreds to flee the country.

Kadir said Asean wanted to see "the same Government as before" in Cambodia.

Asked whether bringing back Ranariddh would be acceptable to Asean, Kadir said an Asean special mission would meet Cambodian leaders to address this and other issues.

The mission was decided at Thursday's meeting and will comprise the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand.

They hope to have an audience with King Norodom Sihanouk in Beijing and then meet Hun Sen and Ranariddh.

Asked if Ranariddh might attend the AMM, Kadir said Wisma Putra had no information on his programme or whereabouts.

He said Myanmar and Laos would be admitted as Asean members at a ceremony on the eve of the AMM.

The AMM will be followed by the ARF - a day-long affair which will discuss regional security issues.

"However, there is no specific agenda between Asean member countries and its dialogue partners," he said.

For the first time, the Ministers would be allowed to have two accompanying officials instead of one as in previous years.

The PMC would be held on July 28 and 29. The PMC is held annually between Asean and its 10 dialogue partners.

The dialogue partners are Australia, the US, Canada, the EU, New Zealand, China, South Korea, Japan, Russia and India.

Kadir said all countries had indicated that they would be represented by their Foreign Ministers.

Papua New Guinea, which had been accorded observer status, would be represented by a special envoy.

Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral has, meanwhile, cancelled his plans to attend the meetings. A Bernama report, quoting official sources, said Gujral was likely to be preoccupied with the election of the Vice-President. India will be represented by Finance Minister P. Chidambaram.

Kadir also said he saw no difficulty for the EU or the US to sit with Myanmar at the ARF as they had done so at other international gatherings. The EU and the US have called for action against Myanmar for its so-called human rights' violation.

Kadir said all information on the meetings could be accessed through the Internet at <http://aseansec.org>. About 300 foreign and 200 Malaysian media representatives are expected to cover the meetings.

The AMM will be officially opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who will also deliver a keynote address.

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