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C'wealth meet may discuss forex issue

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THE currency turmoil currently faced by Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean) members is expected to be raised at the two-day Commonwealth Finance Ministers' meeting in Mauritius next month.

"We hope to discuss how best to secure and defend the economies of the Commonwealth member countries," Commonwealth Secretary-General Chief Emeka Anyaoku said.

The finance ministers did discuss the foreign exchange market and related issues at their meeting last year but only in the context of the Mexican crisis, he said.

At the upcoming meeting, on September 15-16, "we hope to examine the various stages of the speculative attacks on the currencies," Anyaoku told reporters at a luncheon hosted by the National Press Club in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. This is to see if there are lessons for the rest of the developing world as well, he added.

The meeting will also allow members of the Commonwealth to listen to the viewpoints of the organisation's developed countries, especially those which are also members of the Group of Seven, namely UK and Canada.

"We hope the finance ministers can come up with recommendations to address the issue and present them at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in October," he added.

Anyaoku said he had discussed the currency issue with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim at separate meetings.

He met Dr Mahathir on Friday and Anwar yesterday.

Treasury secretary (finance division), Datuk Dr Hadenan Jalil, speaking to reporters after Anyaoku's meeting with Anwar, said the Deputy Prime Minister will likely attend the Mauritius meeting, which is to be held ahead of the World Bank/International Monetary Fund meeting in Hong Kong on September 23.

Hadenan said Anwar may be asked to deliver an address.

Anyaoku also suggested that Asean countries conduct a study on how to protect their economic gains from currency attacks.

"We have seen what happened in Thailand and it may not end there. The impact will also be felt in Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore," he said, adding that the study should look into both long-term and short-term measures that will ensure economic stability.

Anyaoku arrived in Malaysia last Friday for a five-day visit on the third leg of his tour of five countries to hold consultations with their heads of government on preparations for the four-day CHOGM in Edinburgh, Scotland, starting October 24.

Anyaoku, who has visited Singapore and Brunei, leaves for South Africa today. He will visit Namibia before returning to London.

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