

21/07/1997

Setting the tone for vital forum

Badrul Hisham Mahzan; Ashraf Abdullah

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Senior officials and members of the Asean Standing Committee will begin deliberations tomorrow to set the tone for the most important Asean Ministerial Meeting since its inception 30 years ago.

The AMM which begins on Wednesday will see the grouping expand its membership from seven to nine.

Cambodia's admission has been deferred indefinitely due to its domestic political uncertainties, but its Foreign Minister Ung Huot will still be attending the meetings, albeit as an observer.

Analysts said all is not lost for Cambodia as the question of its membership still remains on the agenda.

The Ministers are expected to discuss this at length, keeping in mind the grouping's 30th anniversary in December.

The celebration will most certainly be merrier if all Southeast Asian countries are represented.

Hence, observers eagerly await the outcome of the AMM to see if Cambodia will be admitted by then.

With much excitement about Cambodia and Myanmar, both domestically and regionally, Asean's efforts to downplay the issue of their memberships, may not be entirely possible.

This is because their membership has attracted worldwide attention.

In view of the latest developments, Asean is expected to press for members and the dialogue partners to give equal importance to other issues raised at the meetings.

The media will want to know the outcome of the Asean delegation's recent meeting with King Norodom Sihanouk, First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh and Second Prime Minister Hun Sen.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, Thailand's Prachuab Chaiyasarn and Philippines' Domingo L. Siazon are expected to report to the AMM on their discussions.

The senior officials from the seven countries, being basically responsible for the Asean political co-operation, will take a look at the issues to be discussed by the Ministers.

The entire AMM, ARF and the Post Ministerial Conference will be held at the RM280 million Sunway Lagoon Resort Hotel.

Foreign Ministry secretary-general Datuk Abdul Kadir Mohamad will lead the Malaysian delegation to SOM while Wisma Putra's Asean director-general Datuk Majid Ahmad Khan, the ASC delegation.

The ASC which is chaired by the Foreign Minister of the host country is an advisory body to the permanent committees.

It comprises the secretary-general and the heads of the respective national Asean Secretariats.

Asean Foreign Ministers and representatives from the two observer countries will arrive in Kuala Lumpur on Wednesday, before the signing ceremony of Asean Protocols by the Foreign Ministers.

Later, the Myanmar and Laos Foreign Ministers will call on Asean Standing Committee chairman Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Asean secretary-general Datuk Ajit Singh.

On Thursday, the Foreign Ministers will call on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad before the latter opens the 30th AMM.

On July 27, the ARF will convene with the nine Asean members and the 10 dialogue partners - the United States, China, European Union, Japan,

Russia, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Korea and India.

The issues likely to be raised include security concerns in East Asia and Asia-Pacific regions.

The Post Ministerial Conference will be held the following day and ends on July 29.

(END)