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Summit with 'Asian giants' coming at a crucial time

Patvinder Singh

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon - The Second Asean Informal Summit scheduled for Dec 14-16 will see the group's nine members meeting with leaders of the three largest economies in Asia for the first time and in a period when they are striving to instil confidence in the region currently bogged down by economic problems.

China, Japan and South Korea will be represented by President Jiang Zemin, Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and Prime Minister Koh Kun at the Asean+3 meeting, Foreign Ministry secretary-general Datuk Abdul Kadir Mohamad said at a Press briefing today at the ministry.

"Both the Asean Informal Summit and the Asean+3 meeting comes at a very important time in the sense that the region is facing many problems. So this is an opportunity for Asean to discuss (the problems) at summit level and pick up issues of common concern for the Asean+3 meeting," Abdul Kadir said.

He said Asean is scheduled to meet the three economic giants together after the regional grouping holds its meeting on the morning of Dec 15.

There will be a Press conference by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as host of the summit.

On the morning of Dec 16, there will be three back-to-back Asean+1 meetings between Asean and China, then with Japan and followed by one with South Korea.

"Again there is no formal agenda but the general theme will be Asean's relations with the three countries in the 21st century. Under this we could discuss principles governing relations, economic issues, investment, technology, economic development and stability and Asean co-operation with the three countries," Abdul Kadir said.

He said as the five meetings are informal there was no formal agenda but they were important as they would take place in a climate of economic problems and depreciating currencies in the region.

"The summit will be special in that it will commemorate the 30th anniversary of the founding of Asean and therefore the meeting will also be known as the Asean Commemorative Summit. It will also accept the Asean 2020 Vision plan," Abdul Kadir said.

He said the summit was also important in that Asean members, China, Japan and South Korea would be attending the second Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem) next April in London and the informal summit will provide an opportunity for them to discuss the Asem forum and the impact of globalisation.

"Some of the subjects to be discussed include prospects for East Asia, Asia-Europe relations, the currency issue and further co-operation in the Mekong Basin," Abdul Kadir said.

Asked if the issue of Cambodia would be discussed, he said the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand would update leaders on the situation in Cambodia.

"Cambodia is not involved in this meeting. No invitation has been extended to the country. However, there will be plenty of opportunities for Asean Foreign Ministers to discuss Cambodia," Abdul Kadir said.

Foreign Ministry director-general for Asean, Datuk Abdul Majid Khan, who was also present, said that after the Asean heads of Government meet there would be a signing of a memorandum of understanding on the setting up of the Asean Foundation and this would be followed by Dr Mahathir's launch of

an Asean commemorative book entitled Asean: One Region, One Vision.

He said the MoU would be signed by the Foreign Ministers of Asean and the foundation would be for intra-Asean co-operation in education, scholarships, development of human resources and the eradication of poverty.

Dr Mahathir will host a dinner for the heads of Government on Dec 15 which will also be attended by United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan who will be visiting the country.

There will also be a ceremony to recognise the signatories of the Bangkok Declaration signed in 1967 and which set the founding principles of the regional grouping.

Besides the Asean heads of Government, about 1,000 delegates and a large number of journalists will attend the summit.

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