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Economic woes to be discussed at dialogue

THE currency and stock market problems faced by countries in South-East Asia and East Asia are among the various issues expected to be discussed at a two-day Fourth Pacific Dialogue starting today.

Scheduled to be launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the participants will also discuss issues pertaining to cooperation in terms of regional security, culture and civilisation.

Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim will chair the dialogue, which gathers politicians, policy-makers, academicians and business leaders from countries of the Pacific Rim.

Speaking to reporters after meeting former US Secretary of State Dr Henry Kissinger in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, Anwar said he is pleased with the attendance for this year's dialogue despite the region experiencing a period of economic turbulence.

"We have seen so much support and enthusiasm, not only from the region but also from the US. For example, we have seen a very high level of high-ranking delegation from the US who will be attending this dialogue.

"They include the US Secretary of Defence William Cohen and Kissinger as well as several American business leaders like the American International Group chairman (Maurice Greenberg).

"This is a welcome signal of continued relations, not only because they came here for the dialogue but they have also indicated their strong commitment to continue to invest and work together in this country," he added.

Cohen and Kissinger are among 63 participants who will attend the dialogue.

The dialogue is jointly organised by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies Malaysia, the Washington-based Asia Pacific Policy Centre and the Malaysian Institute of Policy Studies.

It was first held in Penang in 1994.

At the press conference, Anwar was also asked to clarify on the issue of redeployment of foreign workers to other sectors.

He said the redeployment of foreign workers will only be given to those whose permits are yet to expire but had their services terminated because of the economic slowdown.

"For example, foreign workers in the construction sector whose permits have yet to expire but had their services terminated can seek to be redeployed in other sectors such as in plantations," he added.

Anwar, who is also the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Workers chairman, said the affected workers must adhere to the procedures set by the relevant authorities such as the Immigration Department if they intend to seek redeployment in other sectors.

"However, redeployment would not apply to those foreign workers whose working permits had expired," he said when asked to comment on contradicting statements by several quarters pertaining to the redeployment of foreign workers over the last few days.

On the number of foreign workers expected to be redeployed, Anwar said the Immigration Department and the Manpower Department of the Human Resources Ministry should have the figure as these departments are monitoring the situation and the registration of these workers is also conducted by them.

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