

'Asean should not preach but help actively'

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THE Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean) should not dictate its economic policies to Indonesia but instead engage the republic in economic programmes to speed up recovery.

Indonesia's recovery will result in economic benefits to the region as it is Asean's biggest market in terms of population, Foreign Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar said.

Asean countries should lend a hand to help Indonesia resolve its problems, he told Business Times in Kuala Lumpur.

"If Asean countries show confidence by investing in Indonesia, other investors would do the same," he said.

Malaysia, he said, is extending Asean's "Prosper Thy Neighbour" policy to Indonesia through Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's visit to the republic on March 9.

Both Dr Mahathir and Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid will hold talks on economic recovery programmes, and the type of assistance that Malaysia can offer.

"I think it is a start to confidence-building measures that they want to achieve... they look at Malaysia as a country that they can emulate, as a role model, although certain things have to suit their own conditions," Syed Hamid said.

Dr Mahathir's visit is on the invitation of Abdurrahman.

Syed Hamid said Asean can move forward and concentrate on other pressing matters when Indonesia succeeds in overcoming its internal problems.

"We would like our private sector to go back to Indonesia (to invest) but the country needs to convince investors that the situation in Indonesia is conducive and safe for investment," he said.

"It does not matter how much natural resources or human resources you have; if you do not have political stability, investors will still stay away," he said.

Meanwhile, Syed Hamid also called on organisations that have collected donations for East Timor to co-ordinate with the ministry so that the aid will go through the proper channels.

"Where it involves money, I would suggest that they coordinate with the Foreign Ministry... if there is any abuse, it will not be good for the country and the people organising it. It will also create a wrong impression for the East Timorese," he said.

He also suggested that the organisations discuss with the ministry a certain "modus operandi" on how the aid can be sent.

He said the ministry is now looking into the various requests made by East Timor leaders during their visit to the country recently. Xanana Gusmao had called for Malaysians to help rebuild the former Indonesian territory.

Gusmao is the president of the National Council for Timorese Resistance and is tipped to be the first president of East Timor.