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ASEAN-SUMMIT
ASEAN LEADERS MEET FOR INFORMAL SUMMIT

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SINGAPORE, Nov 24 (Bernama) -- Leaders of the 10-member Asean began discussions at the Fourth Asean Informal Summit this morning to chart the direction for the grouping in the post-Asian crisis era.

The 33-year old grouping is going through some tough times and is pressured to send the right signals to show it can get its act together after having lost some lustre due to the crisis and political transition in some member countries.

High on the list of the leaders' topic are economic integration and a framework pact to expedite e-commerce among member countries.

Asean foreign and economic ministers who met yesterday to fine tune the leaders' meeting had set a agenda that could be taken up and endorsed by the leaders.

These include the Singapore-Kunming railway, a proposed project which Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad would brief the leaders on.

Malaysia had chaired a committee to study the feasibility of the RM9.5 billion project.

Other issues are China's proposal to build roads linking Bangkok and Kunming, closer China-Asean cooperation, HIV-AIDS, the South China Sea code of conduct, general security and recommendations by the eminent persons group.

By noon, the leaders are scheduled to sign the e-Asean Framework Agreement that covers issues such as liberalisation, narrowing the digital divide and inter-government cooperation in harmonising laws and digital signatures for trade.

Asean members comprise Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, hosts Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. -- BERNAMA

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