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Syed Hamid-Gusmao

GUSMAO SEEKS M'SIA BACKING FOR ATTENDANCE AT ASEAN MEETS

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 8 (Bernama) -- East Timor has sought Malaysia's backing to enable its independence leader Xanana Gusmao familiarise himself with the workings of Asean by way of attending the various meetings of the leaders of the 10-nation regional grouping.

"They seek our support to facilitate East Timor's attendance at the meetings of Asean leaders in order to be familiar with the way Asean is run," said Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

For this, East Timor wished to be accorded an observer status or in other capacity so as to get to know the Asean members better, Syed Hamid told reporters after receiving Gusmao at his office today.

Asean groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Gusmao arrived here last night for a three-day official visit as part of an Asian tour to secure support for the reconstruction of his strife-torn territory recently independent from Indonesian rule.

Much-touted as East Timor's probable first head of state, Gusmao, who is president of the National Council for Timorese Resistance, is accompanied by Nobel peace prize winner Jose Ramos-Horta.

Replying to a question, Syed Hamid said it was premature to talk about East Timor's membership of Asean as Gusmao himself would need at least two years to form a government there.

"The question of membership does not arise now. He wants to familiarise with the Asean process. My stand is that we'll have to discuss the matter with our Asean partners. 8 "As he has requested to attend, we'll have to make a decision, the status of his presence, all these we'll consider at the appropriate time," said Syed Hamid.

According to the minister, Gusmao also spoke about adopting Malaysia's development experience in rebuilding East Timor.

"They require training in management, diplomacy as well as technical training and asked for secondment of more of our officers to United Nations agencies there. They say our people are not only capable but also understand the environment in East Timor," said Syed Hamid.

In this context, the ministry would send a senior officer to Dili, the capital to train East Timorese diplomats in protocol and counselling. Syed Hamid said.

Gusmao is scheduled to call on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at Putrajaya in the afternoon.

-- BERNAMA

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