

22/11/2000

Key agenda for Asean summit

Charlotte Venudran

SAFEGUARDING regional peace and security, the Asean HIV/AIDS programme and the Trans-Asian Railway link will be the key agenda for Malaysia at the coming Asean Informal Summit in Singapore, said Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

He was speaking to reporters after presenting land titles to 412 Felda settlers from Felda Tunggal in Kota Tinggi on Sunday.

The summit aimed to discuss focused issues of common concern, he added.

As the name suggests, it will be an informal meeting to facilitate free-flow discussion and interaction of government leaders on regional matters.

However, Syed Hamid did not discount the possibility of side meetings between leaders, particularly Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed and his Singapore counterpart, Goh Chok Tong, on bilateral issues.

Stating that Malaysian-Singapore relations would not be discussed at the summit, as it was not the right forum for it, he said: "So far, no side meetings have been planned ... but the leaders may decide to hold meetings."

The four-day summit, which began today, will see the convergence of leaders from 10 Asean countries, China, Japan and Korea.

On ensuring regional peace and security, Syed Hamid said there was a need for a cohesive move to fortify peace through bilateral and regional co-operation.

Some of the areas to be discussed include illegal immigrants, cross border issues and trafficking of women and children within Asean.

He added that Malaysia would also be pushing for the formulation of a comprehensive HIV/AIDS programme for the region.

"We want it to be an Asean programme to address the real dangers of HIV/AIDS affecting Asean countries.

"We do not want the problem to be swept under the carpet. It's time we formulate our own agenda to fight the spread of the disease."

Another topic of interest will be the Trans-Asian Railway link connecting Singapore to Kunming in China.

As Malaysia was keen on promoting the project due to its far-reaching economic prospects, the Minister said the feasibility study would be presented at the summit.

The consultants for the project will also be present to answer questions.

Expected to be completed by 2006, the estimated RM9.5-billion project links seven Asean countries with China.

The proposals in the study have been agreed upon by the Cabinet.

Route One is between 4,000km and 5,000km long and links Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Cambodia, Vietnam and Kunming.

Construction is scheduled to begin in 2003.

(END)