

10 FEB 2000

Syed Hamid-Timor

M'SIA FORESEES NO PROBLEM IN MEETING TIMORESE AID REQUESTS

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 10 (Bernama) -- Malaysia foresees no problem in meeting requests for assistance from East Timorese leaders to rebuild their ravaged and newly-independent territory, said Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

"In principle we have agreed to help them to the best of our ability," he said summing up the significance of the first visit by East Timor leader Xanana Gusmao here. The three-day visit ended yesterday.

Speaking to reporters after presenting excellent service awards to Foreign Ministry staff here today, Syed Hamid welcomed Gusmao's proposal to send a technical team to Malaysia.

It would be a good move to sustain the momentum of Malaysia-East Timor bilateral ties after Gusmao's visit had "broken the ice" with Malaysian leaders, he said.

However, Syed Hamid said, it would be proper for East Timor to have a civil service in place first so that trained officers could actually appraise the real needs of the territory.

"They've listed down the assistance they want, but we have to know what do they really need," Syed Hamid said.

Following talks between Gusmao and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and other ministers, Malaysia has agreed to help train East Timorese diplomats and deploy policemen to help in civilian policing work, among others.

On Gusmao's request that Malaysia enlarge the size of its peace-keeping troops seconded to the United Nations transitional authority in East Timor, Syed Hamid said the government has agreed to this and the Defence Ministry would take the next course of action.

On East Timor being accorded an observer status at meetings of Asean leaders, Syed Hamid said: "I would not like to speculate, when the time comes we will talk about it. Let us not try to prepare them, let them prepare themselves."

-- BERNAMA

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