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Syed Hamid-Cooperation

VIEW ASEAN PLUS THREE AS A POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT, SAYS SYED HAMID

By: R.Ravichandran

BANGKOK, July 24 (Bernama) -- The Asean+3 cooperation should be viewed as a positive development in managing and handling globalisation, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today.

Dismissing the notion that Asean+3, which groups the 10 Asean countries and three East Asian nations of China, Japan and South Korea, is an exclusive club, Syed Hamid said these countries could be effective partners in the whole globalisation process which was moving at a fast pace.

He said the Asean+3 countries had a combination of some 1.5 billion people, meaning a very big market which would not be an exclusive market but a market to compete in the globalised world.

Even China was willing to play a positive role in the globalisation process by preparing to enter the World Trade Organisation (WTO) while Japan had been playing a positive role in helping the developing world, he told a media conference, here.

Syed Hamid said the cooperation between Asean and the three East Asian nations would help narrow the gap between the developed and the developing nations.

"There is Nafta (North America Free Trade Area) and the EU (European Union) and even a single currency and political union, but people are not talking about it becoming a threat. But when Asean gets together why should it cause concerns?" he said.

He was responding to a question about concerns that the Asean+3 was an exclusive club detrimental to the interest of the United States and other Asian Pacific countries.

The foreign ministers of the Asean+3 countries will meet here on Wednesday.

Syed Hamid also said that the just-concluded G-8 summit in Okinawa, Japan, was indeed a success for Malaysia as the grouping had heeded calls by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for the industrialised countries to listen to the voices of the South.

During the G-77 summit in Havana, Cuba, Dr Mahathir had stressed that the G-8 countries must listen to the voices of the South by inviting their representatives and take into consideration views by the South countries.

Syed Hamid said that as a result of Dr Mahathir's suggestion, representatives of the developing world such as Asean, G-77, the Organisation of Africa Unity (OAU) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) were invited to the G-8 summit.

"In the next G-8 summit in Italy, I think they will again invite the representatives of the developing countries. This shows that Malaysia's idea is now gaining acceptance," he said.

Syed Hamid was also asked whether the Asean troika would be put in place to solve the Sipadan hostage problem.

"I think the hostage problem is coming to an end and a successful conclusion," he said.

Syed Hamid said the Asean troika would be an ad hoc body to address any current problems which had an impact on the region.

"So we want a clear term of reference, no misunderstanding about its role and principles that is going to guide us. We are going to adopt and publish it so it will be transparent.

Syed Hamid said such a troika would be on a consensus basis and without compromising the policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other Asean countries.

When asked whether the Asean troika would be put in place to tackle the haze problem, he said Malaysia already had an environmental ministerial-level mechanism with Indonesia and although it seemed not that

effective, nevertheless, discussions and meetings were being conducted to tackle the problem.

Asked whether this AMM meeting would discuss Islamic militancy in view of the Sipadan hostage problem and the Gerik arms heist involving the Al-Ma'unah deviationist group, Syed Hamid said:

"Terrorism has no colours. Any form of cross-border terrorism can be discussed. Not necessarily Islamic. We should not have colouration. Any form of violence and aggression are important issues," he said.

Syed Hamid also said that the Asean countries were working out a human rights mechanism and that the establishment of an Asean human rights commission would not be possible at this point of time.

He said that if such a commission were to be established, then all Asean countries must have their own human rights commission in the first place.

So far only four countries, namely Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, have their own human rights commission.

-- BERNAMA

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