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`We are not exclusive'

Kamarulzaman Salleh in Bangkok

FOREIGN Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the "Asean Plus Three" meeting involving 10 members of the grouping with China, Japan and South Korea should not be viewed as an "exclusive club" detrimental to the interest of major Western economies.

He said there should not be any negative connotation over the meeting to be held on Wednesday in conjunction with the conference and the Asean Regional Forum in Bangkok.

"Why, when the Asean Plus Three meeting is held is a negative connotation given? What is most important is that it has a 1.2 billion population." He said the co-operation was more about how the countries could participate in the global market.

Syed Hamid was responding to a question from a foreign journalist that there was concern over the Asean Plus Three meeting which might be viewed as an exclusive club detrimental to the interest of the United States, European Union and other countries involved in the wider Asia Pacific region.

"There's Nafta and EU (North American Free Trade Agreement and the European Union). People are not talking about it being a bloc or a threat to others.

"But when Asean Plus Three (or when) East Asia gets together, why should there be concern? I think it is our way of managing and handling globalisation so that we can become an effective partner in the whole globalisation process," he said during an interval in the AMM/PMC.

Syed Hamid said the meeting, aimed at strengthening economic and social co-operation among Asean and East Asian nations, should be looked at positively.

"Also, in the case of China entering the World Trade Organisation, it is going to be positive. Japan had also been positive in helping not only the developed world but also the developing world. South Korea is also important.

"This is more real. Otherwise, the gap between the `haves and have not' in the region is going to be wider," he said, adding no region or country would like that to be perpetuated.

Meanwhile, Syed Hamid said Asean's participation in the just concluded G8 meeting in Okinawa, Japan, followed a suggestion from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Havana.

He also said, Asean Foreign Ministers had accepted that Malaysia's recommendation on tackling the HIV/AIDS problem affecting the region be included in the communique to be issued tomorrow.

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