

Hamid: India can be active player in SE Asia

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PUTRAJAYA, Man: India has to iron out several contentious issues and conflicting views such as the views on the US National Missile Defence (NMD) policy before it can be an active player in Southeast Asia.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Syed Albar said today Malaysia rejected the NMD as it undermines global commitment towards reducing conventional and nuclear arsenals.

"The reaction here is negative. The plan does nothing to ensure peace and security in the region. We wanted a total ban on arms and anything that adds to the stockpile as this will not reduce tension.

"However, India is willing to discuss with Malaysia on the matter," he told reporters after a closed-door meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the Indian delegation here today.

Vajpayee is leading a delegation of 138 ministers, senior officials and businessmen on a four-day visit here.

India had come out in support of the controversial NMD, unveiled by US President George Bush two weeks ago, and this response has drawn anger from East Asian countries, namely China.

Syed Hamid said in general, Malaysia is satisfied with India's role at the regional level but stressed that it could be strengthened.

India is a dialogue partner of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) at its many forums like the Asean Plus 1, the Asean Regional Forum and the Post Ministerial Councils.

"We would like to see this role being developed so that it can act as a catalyst to relations between this region and South Asia," he said.

On the meeting, Syed Hamid said the two leaders talked about furthering the

interests of developing countries at all possible venues such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

He said Mahathir had expressed disappointment that the call for reforms in the global financial architecture following the financial crisis had lost its momentum.

"We have to get people talking about it and India is positive in collaborating with us to push the agenda," he added.