

Asean vows cooperation against terror, other crime

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SINGAPORE, Wed: The Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean) pledged to step up cooperation against drug trafficking, piracy, money laundering and terrorism today at a one-day gathering of regional home and interior ministers.

The Asean forum also announced plans for a special meeting to discuss terrorism.

"We strongly condemned all acts of terrorism, in particular the terrorist attacks of September 11 on the US," the ministers said in a communique at the end of the 3rd Asean Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime in Singapore.

"We acknowledged that transnational crime continues to seriously threaten the socio-economic and moral fabric of all countries. We reiterated our deep concern that transnational crime is becoming more organised, diversified and perva-

sive." The ministers said they plan a meeting of senior officials to consider terrorism issues.

Malaysia will then host a special Asian Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime.

The communique did not give details, but Bernama said the first meeting on terrorism would take place in Jakarta in January.

The meeting on transnational crime was set for April in Kuala Lumpur.

Asean groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Singapore Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, speaking at the opening of the meeting, called on the 10-nation grouping to broaden cooperation within itself and beyond the region.

"Asean needs to work with

the rest of the world to support anti-terrorism efforts. Terrorist networks extend across many countries and we too are at risk," Lee said.

"Among ourselves, we should strive to cooperate more closely to fight terrorism, especially through increased exchange of information and intelligence using existing law enforcement and intelligence channels."

Malaysian Deputy Home Minister Datuk Chor Chee Heung said his country was ready to cooperate in the fight against crime but appeared to caution Washington on the extent of its reaction.

"Malaysia is ready to join efforts with its regional neighbours in this combat," he said.

"Nonetheless, Malaysia would like to reiterate that it does not support the waging of war on any country just suspected of harbouring terrorists

as innocent lives will be claimed along the war path."

He repeated a suggestion by Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for an international conference on terrorism to be held as soon as possible under the auspices of the United Nations.

Piracy was another regional concern high on the agenda at today's meeting.

According to the International Maritime Bureau, there were 469 cases of piracy on the high seas and armed robberies of ships in territorial waters last year — a 57 per cent rise from 1999.

The ministers also looked at ways to tackle money laundering.

In addition, they voiced concern over an increase in crimes using the Internet, saying this could affect regional peace and security. — Agencies