

05/11/2001

Malaysia offers RM4.94m training package

Ashraf Abdullah

MALAYSIA has offered a RM4.94 million training package to Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, the less developed Asean partners, to enhance their human resource capabilities.

Briefing Malaysian journalists on the eve of the two-day Asean Summit which begins today, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad would announce the package at the summit tomorrow.

Syed Hamid said these countries needed human resource training in administration and management.

"This is part of Asean's capacity building programme which Malaysia is contributing to," he said.

He said the package would cover training programmes over the next three years.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia had been contributing to human resource development in Asean countries for many years.

"This is an on-going programme," he said.

He added that Malaysia had been providing employment to many immigrants from Asean countries.

"We have in fact spent billions of ringgit employing them," he said.

He said Dr Mahathir would also raise the issue of HIV/AIDS during a special session at the summit.

"Malaysia feels that there must be political will among Asean countries to co-operate to fight this scourge. No Asean country can claim that it is free of HIV/AIDS," he said.

Under an agreement reached at their summit in Singapore last year, the leaders will convene a session on HIV/AIDS to consider an Asean Work Programme in this area. They are also expected to declare support for national, regional and international efforts to address this new priority.

The special session of HIV/AIDS is a proposal by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Dr Mahathir made the proposal at the Fifth International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP) in Kuala Lumpur in October 1999.

The primary objective of the session on HIV/AIDS is to mobilise solidarity and "peer" political support to make HIV/AIDS a national priority and collaborate on inter-country/cross-border issues and exchange of technical expertise.

A separate leaders' statement on HIV/AIDS is expected.

Meanwhile, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said Malaysia welcomed the proposal for an Asean-China Free Trade Area.

However, she said various stages of co-operation between Asean and China had to be looked at before looking towards an FTA.

Senior officials say if the proposal materialises, the FTA will be the largest in the world, with a combined market of two billion people.

At the last Asean-China summit in Singapore last year, Prime Minister Zhu Rongji raised the likelihood of a Asean-China FTA to strengthen trade and investment links.

Following the proposal, Asean and China set up an expert group to study the broader aspect of their economic relations into the 21st century.

Officials said the expert group compiled a report which was reviewed by senior officials of both sides ahead of the summit.

They recommended the setting up of the Asean-China FTA, covering a market of 1.7 billion people - comprising China's 1.2 billion people and 500 million more in Asean's 10 countries. As of last year, Asean and China had a combined gross domestic product of almost US\$1.7 trillion (RM6.46 trillion) and total external trade value of nearly US\$1.3 trillion.