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BFA-Ajit

MEMBERSHIP IN BOAO FORUM FOR ASIA OPEN TO ALL COMPANIES

By: Yong Soo Heong

BOAO (Hainan), Feb 25 (Bernama) -- Membership in the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) is open to any company in the world so long as it has an interest in Asia, says BFA's pro tem secretary-general Tan Sri Ajit Singh.

Given that BFA was non-governmental and non-political, it was open to any company keen on promoting more trade and investment in the region, he told a briefing here today.

"They can be located anywhere, be it Europe, North America or Latin America so long as they have an interest in Asia," he said.

All in all, participants from 25 Asian countries including Malaysia will attend BFA which will begin tomorrow where Ajit will be formally appointed as secretary-general.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will deliver a keynote address at the inauguration of BFA on Tuesday.

Ajit said Dr Mahathir was chosen to deliver the keynote address because of the recognition accorded to the Malaysian premier as the most senior among the leaders and his reputation as the "Voice of Asia", especially with his championing the cause of East Asian countries.

Tracing BFA's establishment, he said the idea was mooted by several former Asian leaders when they met in 1998.

They felt that an Asian-wide body to provide greater trade and investment as well as cooperation should be set up, he said.

The Chinese government then gave full support by providing a permanent secretariat in Boao on Hainan island, he said.

Ajit felt that Boao, located at the southernmost tip of China, was chosen because the Chinese government wanted to show that it did not want to be seen as "dominating" the forum and the location was also close to many South East Asian nations.

He also said the proposed research institute to be set up under the auspices of BFA would not be a university-like institution but more of a research body for current trade and economic issues.

Ajit stressed that BFA's emphasis would be to promote greater inter-dependence in the economic field among Asian countries through the exchange of ideas among leaders, business leaders and academics.

-- BERNAMA

SHY AT YBY