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Summit to focus on terrorism

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SENIOR officials from the 10 Southeast Asian nations will begin their deliberations today to set the tone for the Seventh Asean Leaders' Summit here beginning Monday.

The leaders are expected to discuss a host of issues.

These include the mid-term review of the Hanoi Plan of Action which sets forth a six-year programme towards achieving Asean's Vision 2020.

Terrorism is also expected to take centre stage.

Brunei is expected to table a draft declaration on terrorism which will culminate in a separate Asean Declaration on Combating International Terrorism.

The leaders are expected to:

- * agree to a Malaysian proposal which calls for an international conference on terrorism to tackle its root causes;
- * recommend practical and concrete courses of action to strengthen Asean co-operation on co-ordination of policy and action against terrorism;
- * review existing international instruments on terrorism with the view to harmonising or integrating them with existing Asean mechanism; and,
- * explore methods and modalities to link Asean efforts with the East Asian and other countries to make the fight against terrorism a truly regional and global endeavour.

Asean countries feel that the scope and scale of the terrorist attacks in various places in the United States on Sept 11 and the likelihood that their perpetrators have connections, adherents and sympathisers in various parts of the Southeast Asian region, demand a collective response.

The Declaration is expected to be Asean's contribution to the world-wide effort to address the problem of international terrorism and will:

- * Constitute Asean's collective response to the United Nations call that the international community fight all threats to international peace and security caused by terrorism by all necessary means, in accordance with the international law and the United Nations Charter;
- * affirm Asean's commitment to join the international counter-terrorist coalition and to work with the UN to bring to justice the perpetrators, organisers and sponsors of the terrorist attacks and to hold accountable those responsible for aiding, supporting and harbouring them;
- * demonstrate that Asean joins other regional groupings in the Americas, South Asia and Europe and the Organisation of Islamic Conference in a world-wide network to combat this threat to international peace and security, and:
- * commit the Asean countries to undertake specific measures to combat terrorism.

The leaders are expected to instruct their Ministers responsible for Home Affairs to convene a meeting next year to discuss transnational crime with a special focus on international terrorism.

The summit, to be chaired by Sultan of Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, will be the first working summit since Asean leaders agreed in Singapore last year to remove the distinction between formal and informal summits in favour of less ceremonial gatherings.

In dealing with the concerns of terrorism and the global economic downturn, the Asean leaders are expected to discuss a wide range of topics such as bridging the development gap.

They are also expected to consider moving beyond free-trade commitments

with far reaching co-operation in many areas.

The leaders are expected to discuss possible acceleration of the Asean Free Trade Area and the proposal for a new round of World Trade Organisation talks.

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.

The Asean leaders are also scheduled to hold additional talks with the leaders of China, Japan and South Korea on Monday, the fifth such gathering since the enlarged Asean+3 summit began in 1997.

The leaders are also expected to discuss the global economic downturn as well as closer East Asian partnership between Asean and the three Northeast Asian countries.

On Tuesday, the Southeast Asian leaders will together hold separate "Asean+1" meetings with each of the three leaders. The theme of these talks is enhancing Asean Co-operation with China, Japan and South Korea.

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