

# Asean Three versusterror

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KL, Manila and Jakarta to jointly fight Islamic militants

**PUTRAJAYA:** Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines signed a security arrangement yesterday to counter cross-border terrorism and break a militant network they say is out to turn the Malay archipelago into an Islamic state.

The pact caps months of negotiations and follows an agreement by the 10 Asean countries in November to cooperate to fight terrorism in the aftermath of the Sept 11 attacks on the United States.

But the three members decided to have formal security coordination between them because of their ethnic links, large Muslim population and porous borders.

A statement issued after the signing ceremony said the signatories, referred to collectively as the Malay archipelago, agreed to coordinate security operations to fight terrorism and transnational crime within their territories.

The agreement on "Exchange of Information and Establishment of Communication Procedures" was signed by Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, his Indonesian counterpart Hassan Wira-

yuda and Philippine Interior and Local Government Secretary Jose D. Lina Jr. Prime Minister batuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Philippines President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo witnessed the signing (picture Page 2).

Mahathir, speaking a few hours earlier, said the security arrangement would be a "useful" weapon against regional terror groups.

"It is useful. Because we can exchange information about the

terrorist attacks," he said.

Asked specifically why Singapore is not included, Mahathir said: "Because we (Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines) are near to one another."

Syed Hamid said a joint committee will be set up to handle issues involving transnational crimes, such as smuggling and terrorism. He said the agreement is open to any Asean country

"There are indications that other Asean countries are also interested in joining," he said.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda said the agreement contains 23 areas of cooperation. "They include exchange of intelligence, joint operations in areas such as terrorist hunts weapons smuggling, drugs and related crimes," he said.

Philippines national defence secretary Angelo Reyes on Monday described the pact as the only way to defeat terrorism. He said terrorist groups had found it easy to recruit members in Southeast Asia, where 520 million Muslims live. - Agencies

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movement and activities of these people (terrorists)," he said after addressing the Organisation of the Islamic Conference meeting.

He described it as timely because there are attempts to establish a single Islamic state out of the three countries.

"What is their Islamic state I do not know. I have not seen them do anything except a lot of damage to people and carry out a lot of ter-