Leaders discuss Asean+3 secretariat, soft loans

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad held a fruitful meeting with his Japanese counterpart Junichiro Koizumi yesterday with Japan giving its assurance that it will continue to assist Malaysia.

Speaking to Malaysian reporters in Tokyo late last night, Dr Mahathir said that the two main issues brought up during yesterday morning's meeting were the setting up of the Asean+3 secretariat and soft loans for projects in Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir said Japan supports the proposal for the secretariat to be set up in Malaysia. The setting up of the secretariat is a prelude to the formalisation of the proposed East Asian Economic Grouping (EAEG).

China has voiced its support much earlier on the EAEG concept, while South Korea is bullish on the idea.

It was the South Korean President who proposed that Asean+3 move more formally towards the establishment of the EAEG.

As for soft loans, Dr Mahathir said one such loan has not been approved as some Malaysian environmentalists have consistently voiced their objections to the project concerned, namely, the proposed project to bring water from Pahang to Selangor.

He said Japan has given these objections some "serious consideration".

Earlier yesterday, Dr Mahathir met Dr Kisho Kurokawa, the architect for the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang, to discuss the bio-valley concept. "We want to set up the bio-valley and locate three institutions involved in research in genomics," Dr Mahathir said.

Separately, a Japanese Foreign Ministry official said Koizumi proposed hosting a meeting of Japanese and Asean economic ministers later this year to strengthen economic ties in the region.

Koizumi made the proposal when he held separate talks with Dr Mahathir and Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

The official added: "Both President Arroyo and Prime Minister Mahathir welcomed the proposal. We will begin preparations for the conference." — Agencies