

PM: Asem not in position to do much

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COPENHAGEN: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who does not expect "very much" politically from the 4th Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem-4), joined his Asian counterparts in a one-hour meeting yesterday in preparation for serious business today.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the Asian leaders would raise various issues during the two-day summit.

"They will, among others, touch on the issue of peace and security in the Korean peninsula and also trade and investment between the European Union and Asia," he added.

Also on the agenda of the summit of 15 European and 10 Asian leaders are new security measures to tackle terrorism and transnational crime in the aftermath of the terrorist attack in the United States on

Sept 11 last year.

During his stopover in London on Saturday, the Prime Minister was asked by Malaysian journalists whether he expected much from the summit, which is meeting at a time of heightened tensions.

"I do not expect very much. Asem countries are not really in a position to influence things," he said.

However, he did warn in an address to a British multi-faith organisation that these tensions – such as the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and the US confrontation with Iraq – were causing the Muslim world to feel that they were being more oppressed by the West.

Dr Mahathir urged the West to look at the bigger picture of the conflicts and tensions in the world, tackling the political root causes of these problems, rather than relying

mainly on military means to overcome them.

While the Europeans would be seeking a common approach on tackling terrorism and transnational crime, they have identified the need to deal with the "social root causes" of these problems, such as poverty, lack of basic education, persistent unemployment and slow economic growth.

Reflecting their concern, for the first time since the launch of Asem in Bangkok in 1997, the leaders will attend an informal retreat later today to

start a dialogue among cultures and civilisations.

Chris Patten, the EU Commissioner of External Relations, summed up Europe's hopes when he said recently in London that the retreat was a "unique opportunity" to signal to the world "that dialogue and co-operation will prevail over fear."

Dr Mahathir expressed concern that the present world tensions had an underlying religious strand, which was undermining the need for bet-

ter understanding between the Muslim world and the West.

He also told the Malaysian journalists that on other matters such as investment and trade – an item that is also high on the Asem-4 agenda – agreement on more co-operation could be reached.

The Europeans want the summit to send a strong political signal to try to restore confidence in the international economy, believing that both sides have a role in improving market access and investment conditions.