

28 JUL 2002

Asean-Secretariat

AMM TO DISCUSS MALAYSIA'S OFFER TO HOST ASEAN+3 SECRETARIAT

By: Jackson Sawatan

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, July 28 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's offer to host the Asean+3 Secretariat has been included in the agenda for discussion at the two-day 35th Asean Ministerial Meeting (AMM) here from tomorrow, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said.

Describing the inclusion as something positive, he said this had brought the proposal "out in the open".

"The Asean+3 will be discussed and Kuala Lumpur offers to look further into how to go about establishing the secretariat," he said at a media briefing on his arrival to attend the 35th AMM here.

It is learnt that Malaysia's wish to host the secretariat had been included in the draft of the joint-communique to be issued at the end of AMM on Tuesday afternoon.

In the draft communique, it is understood that Asean foreign ministers would also want the Asean Secretariat based in Jakarta strengthened but noted Malaysia's offer to host the Asean+3 Secretariat in Kuala Lumpur.

Syed Hamid said: "At least, we have put the subject on the agenda to be discussed...before this, it was never discussed (in that manner). First when we discussed even the Asean+3, there was no agreement, but Kuala Lumpur went on (with the offer)," he said.

The Asean+3 -- seen as the refined version of East Asian Economic Grouping or EAEG mooted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad -- groups all the 10 Asean countries plus Japan, China and Korea.

"We want it to be recorded...otherwise it remains within the corridor of power. We want it to be in public domain, that it has been discussed, but the only thing is that we have not arrived at the final decision," he said.

Asked on the perception that the proposed Asean+3 Secretariat would "steal the shine" from the Asean Secretariat in Jakarta, Syed Hamid said: "I think the members are convinced of the importance of the secretariat...there is no rejection to it.

"And I don't think the discussion at the moment is on the concern that it will take the shine (from the Jakarta Secretariat)...I don't think it will happen because Asean is operating on its own."

He said Asean+3 was entirely a different ball game altogether and if nothing was done, the "plus three" countries might think that Asean was not giving meaningful effort to it.

On putting Asean+3 matter under a bureau or unit of the Jakarta Secretariat, Syed Hamid said such setup would not reflect the importance of Asean+3.

"Our view is that if we do that, the focus will be different. We want Asean Secretariat to focus on Asean activities while another secretariat at the wider Asean+3 context rather than just be an addendum to Asean Secretariat," he said.

-- BERNAMA

JS ABG