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ASEM-Terrorism

ASEM MUST SEND STRONG POLITICAL SIGNAL ON FIGHTING TERRORISM

By: Mikhail Raj Abdullah

COPENHAGEN, Sept 22 (Bernama) -- Asian and European leaders must send a strong political signal to the international community on ways to effectively combat terrorism and more importantly find its root causes, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Saturday.

He said that with the threat of terrorism cutting across borders as well as ethnic, cultural and religious lines, the leaders needed to clearly spell out cooperative efforts to deal with the problem successfully.

"We must ascertain why people turn to terrorist activities so that we can provide an accurate diagnosis in efforts to combat terrorism effectively," he said when briefing Malaysian journalists here ahead of the fourth Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) beginning Monday.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, is scheduled to arrive here today to attend ASEM, which is an informal summit held biennially between 10 Asian countries and 15 European Union (EU) members as well as the European Commission.

Established at the first summit in 1996, it was followed by similar meetings in London in 1998 and Seoul in 2000. ASEM aims to bring both regions closer together in the political, socio and economic spheres.

Syed Hamid said that leaders' stand on ways to fight terrorism and the new security issues in the aftermath of the Sept 11 attacks would be contained in the Copenhagen Declaration expected to be issued at the end of the gathering.

He said that other issues related to terrorism such as transnational crime as well as illegal immigration which is of great relevance to Malaysia would also be touched upon by the leaders.

Dr Mahathir, who would arrive at noon at the Copenhagen International Airport at Kastrupp outside the Danish capital, would proceed to the sprawling Bella Center after lunch for a meeting among Asian leaders today to prepare an Asian Copenhagen working programme on fighting terrorism.

Tonight, he would join Asian and European leaders for an informal working dinner hosted by Danish Prime Minister Andersfogh Rasmussen.

Other topics for discussion by Asian leaders include peace in the Korean Peninsula, a matter which has gained importance with North Korea opening up further; Asean's cooperation with China, Japan and South Korea; and the enlargement of the EU membership.

Touching on the informal and interactive nature of the discussions between leaders, he said this would provide a valuable opportunity for them to understand each other better "given the many differences and distinctiveness so that there is no room for uncertainties."

"In this way, it is hoped that Asian and European leaders would, through their free-flowing discussions, help to create better understanding of the cultures, civilisations and religions that exist in our two regions," he said.

He also highlighted a luncheon retreat whereby leaders would discuss the differing cultures and civilisations.

"Interestingly enough, its theme is unity in diversity because rather than creating a hegemonistic world, what we must accept is the world with all its diversity and how we take advantage of that diversity and make it our strength rather than our divide," he said.

Turning to discussions on economic and financial cooperation, he said

the leaders would look into ways to overcome the recent global downturn as a result of the Sept 11 attacks.

It will also encompass trade facilitation action programmes and investment promotion action plans to further improve market access and investment conditions in both regions.

Besides this, he said that leaders would reaffirm their commitment to ensuring the successful completion of the 2000 World Trade Organisation (WTO) trade talks in Doha.

They will also touch on the global economic situation, the euro as an international currency, and the outcome of the Asean Finance Ministers Meeting and Asean Economic Ministers Meeting held this year.

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