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Australian summit attempt rebuffed

AUSTRALIA'S fast-track attempt to raise its dialogue relations with Asean to a summit level was rebuffed yesterday.

No consensus was reached on the matter at the Asean summit here, which means it was a non-starter.

The Asean-Australia summit is believed to have been proposed by Singapore, which has just concluded a free-trade agreement with Australia.

A number of countries are opposed to the inclusion of Australia, and it is understood that Thailand is one of them.

Some Asean members are not happy as the proposal did not go through the "normal" channels, by-passing both the Asean senior officials and ministers.

This comes at a time when Asean, which is facing increased challenges in the wake of globalisation, needs to focus on integration.

The 10-member grouping should also give priority to the development needs of newer members.

Even McKinsey & Company in its Asean Competitiveness Study has stressed the need for the grouping to integrate and strengthen its internal mechanisms to avoid losing out in an increasingly competitive world environment.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had stressed the need for integration in all areas, especially in trade and investment.

Regional co-operation is necessary to face challenges, including the threats posed by terrorism.

Dr Mahathir had reiterated his stand on identifying the root causes of terrorism and dealing with them.

He also touched on Asean+3 and how Malaysia had benefited from its Look East Policy.

The country is now looking to South Korea, which has been able to overcome its economic problems.