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Syed Hamid-Asean

DR MAHATHIR EXPECTED TO RAISE ASEAN+3 SECRETARIAT IN MEETINGS WITH
MEGAWATI AND THAKSIN

By: Mohd Kamel Othman

DENPASAR, Aug 7 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is expected to raise the need to set up the Asean+3 Secretariat in Kuala Lumpur when he meets President Megawati Sukarnoputri and Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra here tomorrow.

"I hope the Prime Minister will explain this to Megawati and Thaksin when they meet here tomorrow," said Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar here today.

Dr Mahathir, who arrived here today for a two-day working visit, will hold a meeting with Megawati.

Thaksin will also be here to witness the signing of a tripartite agreement involving Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand on control the rubber price and market to safeguard the interest of the three producing countries.

The signing of the agreement will be in conjunction with the the meeting between Dr Mahathir and Megawati.

Syed Hamid said that in wanting to site Asean+3 Secretariat in Kuala Lumpur, it was not Malaysia's intention to undermine the Asean Secretariat in Jakarta.

He said Asean+3 would enable the grouping to give attention to certain areas of cooperation within the context of Asean.

"It is not competing but complementing our efforts within the context of Asean and Asean+3," he said.

Asean groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Last year, Malaysia proposed at the Asean meeting in Brunei that the Asean+3 Secretariat be based in Kuala Lumpur.

Considering that the idea came from Dr Mahathir, Malaysia hoped that it be given the opportunity to host the secretariat of the Asean and its three dialogue partners of China, Japan and South Korea.

However, the proposal was turned down at the recent Asean Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in Brunei.

Syed Hamid said the future of Asean depended greatly on the cooperation of Asean+3 and as such countries in the region should welcome the intention of China, Japan and South Korea which wanted to see closer cooperation in East Asia.

He said Malaysia's willingness to offer US\$10 million (RM38 million) assistance as well as to bear the expenses of the secretariat in Kuala Lumpur for five years should not be doubted.

Syed Hamid hoped that Indonesia, as a close neighbour, would support the proposal to set up Asean+3 Secretariat in Kuala Lumpur when both leaders met tomorrow.

"I understand that in Asean, we need to do things step by step but there are quick steps and slow steps. In this respect, we have discussed for sometime and we have seen now that Asean+3 is no longer a dream but specific projects.

"As such, why don't we make Asean+3 an institution?" he said.

He said Malaysia made the proposal after seeing that the Asean+3 activities had covered all fields including the annual meeting of economic, tourism and agriculture ministers as well senior Asean officials.

"We feel disappointed (when it was rejected in Brunei) but we know in diplomatic efforts not all could realise quickly, unless of course we have

a magic wand," he said.

-- BERNAMA

MKO MAM ABG