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Syed Hamid-Asean

ASEAN+3 TO BE TABLED AT MINISTERIAL MEETING IN BRUNEI

KOTA TINGGI, June 14 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is to submit a proposal to set up the permanent secretariat for "Asean+3" in Kuala Lumpur at the Asean Foreign Ministers' Meeting to be held in Brunei following the encouraging response received so far.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Malaysia had already announced its offer to come out with a US\$10 million expenditure for the initial expenses in setting up the secretariat.

"We are quite encouraged by the response so far... Japan and South Korea also seem to have no objection and feel that matters under Asean+3 are now increasing and need follow-up.

"As such, it is best that the secretariat is set up permanently," he told reporters here when asked to comment further on the permanent secretariat between Asean and China, Japan and South Korea.

He said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had raised the matter and had received no objection from anyone and that was why the proposal, which was now at the officers' level, was being followed up at the Foreign Ministers' level.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia felt that there was now an urgency in the establishment of the secretariat following the developments and challenges from globalisation as well as the changing situations in the world.

On the India-Pakistan conflict, he said so far the question of Malaysia playing a mediator's role in the conflict did not arise.

He welcomed the withdrawal of warships by the two countries, the opening up of air space for civil aviation and India's agreement to reopen its High Commission in Pakistan and possibly vice-versa.

In another development, he said Malaysia, as chairman of the Contact Group of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) to assist Sierra Leone, was prepared to provide technical assistance and expertise to the west African nation to help in land development schemes there.

Syed Hamid said Sierra Leone was keen to emulate the Felda land schemes and the development of the commercial agriculture sector which had long been successfully implemented here.

"Sierra Leone has almost similar climate and soil as Malaysia and the successful land schemes in Malaysia have impressed them in efforts to bring their people out of poverty," he said.

Earlier, he had accompanied the OIC Contact Group which included Sierra Leone Foreign Minister Momodu Koroma, who is also the Minister for International Cooperation, and the country's Presidential Advisor Ramadan Dumbuya on a visit to Felda Semenchu, near here, which represents the best Felda scheme in Johor.

Syed Hamid said Sierra Leone received an allocation from the World Bank for use to help its people and Malaysia had the expertise which was most useful to them.

Meanwhile, Koroma told reporters that his country wanted to learn more about Malaysia's land schemes as there was an immediate need for his government to implement such schemes to assist its displaced citizens which numbered about one million out of the total five million population.

"About one million of our people were displaced and became refugees as a result of war and now that peace has returned, we would like to assist them and bring them home," he said.

Koroma said his country of 76,000 square kilometres had the land and

resources to implement Felda-like schemes which he regarded as highly impressive as Felda not only organised the people to be self-sufficient and productive but also showed high ability for sustainable development.

"We're interested in the resettlement scheme... to bring back our people with a difference... to resettle them properly into very productive life," he said.

He said his country was also rich in diamond, gold and bauxite and was looking forward to more extensive trade with Malaysia.

"We would like to have a mission here in Malaysia, to be able to learn first hand... including on poverty eradication strategy and ways to develop our resources," he said, adding that a delegation of officials from Sierra Leone would be visiting Malaysia soon.

-- BERNAMA

MNY AO