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Asean-Secretariat

THERE MUST BE A UNIT PENDING ASEAN+3 SECRETARIAT, SAYS SYED HAMID

By: Jackson Sawatan

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, Aug 1 (Bernama) -- Malaysia said a unit under the Asean Secretariat may need to be established to look after Asean+3 activities pending the establishment of a separate Asean+3 secretariat.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said said Asean+3 played an important role and its activities needed monitoring, coordination and follow-up.

"Because of the importance of Asean+3, we would like to see a separate secretariat. In the meantime if they do not have a separate secretariat, they must have something in order to monitor and manage the Asean+3 activities," he told a news conference at the end of the Post Ministerial Conference (PMC) here today.

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

Asean ministers at their 35th Asean Ministerial Meeting (AMM) two days ago could not arrive at a consensus on the setting up of a separate secretariat for the Asean+3.

The 35th AMM however noted in its joint-communique of Malaysia's wish to host the Asean+3 Secretariat in Kuala Lumpur.

Syed Hamid said: "Although we could not arrive at a concensus...we will continue to pursue it."

He said Cambodia would be organising a brainstorming session attended by Asean+3 officials to deliberate on the matter of which the timing would be determined later.

The Asean+3 concept as propagated by Malaysia had been well-received, Syed Hamid said, but the the question was where the grouping would be moving from now.

"Should we stop at that and let it be part of the Asean secretariat or os there a need for us to look at a separate secretariat so that they would be more efficient, able to monitor and ensure no duplication of function between the two secretariats," he said.

On the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, Syed Hamid said it was not yet in its final draft.

"It is still open to discussion and amendment but the framework of it is ready and I think there would not be much changes," he said.

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

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