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KL seeks to set up Asean+3 bureau

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INSTEAD of the proposed Asean+3 secretariat in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia now wants to set up a bureau that will get directions from and answer to the Asean secretariat in Jakarta.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is expected to raise this in discussions with other Asean leaders at the Eighth Asean Summit which begins today.

During meetings of Asean senior officials and ministers which ended yesterday, no consensus was reached on the new approach.

"Whether it is accepted or not at the level of leaders, we shall wait and see.

"If no decision is made, we will not stop there. We will continue with our efforts to explain our intention," Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said yesterday.

The Asean+3 bureau was first mooted during the Asean senior officials meeting in Brunei in July.

Syed Hamid said the bureau would put in place an efficient follow-up and monitoring system for activities and programmes involving East Asian countries.

It would focus on capacity-building, development of information technology and economic co-operation, he added.

The bureau, he said, would not be an independent body and would get directions from and be responsible to the Asean secretariat in Jakarta.

Malaysia has proposed a seed funding of US\$10 million (RM38 million) for the first five years of the bureau's operations.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia was willing to be flexible due to the fears of a few Asean members that its earlier Asean+3 secretariat proposal would result in the Asean secretariat losing its importance.

"We are doing this in the interest of East Asia," he said.

Asean+3 groups all 10 Southeast Asian countries and three northeast Asian countries - Japan, China and South Korea.