

02/08/2002

Malaysia to push for Asean+3 secretariat

reports on "Asean Ministerial Meeting 2002" by Saiful Azhar Abdullah; FOREIGN Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said yesterday Malaysia would continue to pursue the establishment of an Asean+3 secretariat in view of the importance of institutionalising the Asean+3 process.

Speaking after the Post-Ministerial Conference, he said Malaysia had reiterated its position that there was a need for a separate secretariat to monitor Asean+3 activities.

"Malaysia's ultimate aim, because of the importance of Asean+3, is to see a separate secretariat.

"If there's no separate secretariat, we must have something to monitor and manage the Asean+3 activities," he said.

He was referring to the consensus reached by the Asean Ministerial Meeting (AMM) to have a unit in the Asean Secretariat in Jakarta to monitor and co-ordinate the Asean+3 activities.

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

The AMM on Tuesday rejected Malaysia's proposal to have a separate secretariat.

The members also rejected an offer by Malaysia to host a branch of the unit in Kuala Lumpur and Ministers could not agree in principle on the need for an Asean+3 secretariat.

"Although we have not arrived at a consensus, in so far as getting a separate Asean+3 secretariat in Kuala Lumpur, we will nevertheless continue to pursue the matter."

He said Cambodia would organise a brainstorming session for Asean+3 officials to deliberate on the matter. The date of meeting will be determined later.

Syed Hamid said the Asean+3 concept propagated by Malaysia had been well-received, but where would the grouping move to from now.

"Should we stop at that and let it be part of the Asean secretariat or is there a need for us to look at a separate secretariat so that it would be more efficient," 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. The framework of it is ready and I think there would not be much changes," he said.