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Asean-Secretariat

MALAYSIA CAN GET THINGS MOVING BY BEING ASEAN+3 SECRETARIAT

By: Jackson Sawatan

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, July 27 (Bernama) -- Malaysia should be able to get things moving fast for the East Asian grouping if it were given the nod by member countries to become the Asean+3 Secretariat, an Asean official said today.

He said Malaysia could get cracking straight away, even next year, if all members agreed to have the secretariat located in the country.

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 and Japan, China and Korea.

Kuala Lumpur's wish to have the secretariat located in the country is expected to be among matters to be discussed at the 35th Asean Ministerial Meeting (AMM) here on Monday.

The official who requested anonymity, said: "I think Malaysia would be able to act fast if this (AMM) meeting agreed that it becomes the Asean+3 Secretariat."

The official, however, admitted there were some apprehension among member countries over the setting up of the secretariat fearing it might "steal the shine" from the Asean Secretariat based in Jakarta.

"This is probably because the idea of having the Asean+3 Secretariat is coming up too fast and they say it may need further study...hence the need to strike a balance and sort of realignment between the two secretariats so that it would not become a parent-child setup," he said.

He said that no country had voiced their official objection to have the Asean+3 Secretariat located in Malaysia.

Asked on the issue, former Philippine foreign secretary Domingo Siazon said that although the Asean+3 secretariat was important "it is probably too early to make a stand on it because we have to look at how the structure is."

"Probably I would say it needs three to five years to take off," he said, noting that the Philippine government had recognised the importance of an East Asian community.

Asked on the perception that the Asean+3 Secretariat would overshadow the Jakarta Secretariat, he said: "I think that Asean has to be more confident of itself.

"You should never worry about losing your character or reputation just because there will be another secretariat. If you are good, you will be able to compete," he said.

On the contrary, he said, there would be more reason to have the Asean Secretariat when the Asean+3 Secretariat is established.

"This is to make sure the interest of the 10 Asean members which had different economic development levels are fully-protected and represented in the Asean+3," he said.

Siazon said that "he had no view" on where the secretariat should be located.

Director-General of Asean Department, Foreign Ministry of Thailand Suchita Hiranpreuk meanwhile said they would prefer strengthening the Jakarta Secretariat first.

"But it is open for discussion," she said.

-- BERNAMA

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