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Asean-Bureau

MALAYSIA SUGGESTS ASEAN+3 BUREAU, NOT SECRETARIAT

By: Muin Abdul Majid

PHNOM PENH, Nov 3 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is now readjusting its approach in efforts to convince other Asean member states on the need to set up a body in Kuala Lumpur to monitor and facilitate Asean's activities with its three dialogue partners -- China, Japan and South Korea.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said instead of calling it an Asean+3 "secretariat", Malaysia was prepared to change it to an Asean+3 "bureau" which would come under the purview of the Asean secretariat in Jakarta.

"We previously talked about establishing a secretariat. But we think that if this gives rise to questions, we can accept an approach that would see the creation of an Asean+3 bureau in Kuala Lumpur," he told a media briefing on his arrival here for the 8th Asean Summit which begins in the Cambodian capital tomorrow.

Malaysia is represented at the two-day summit by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Syed Hamid was responding to questions on Malaysia's attempt to set up such a body given the fear expressed by several Asean member countries that it could eclipse the existing Asean secretariat in the Indonesian capital.

Syed Hamid said even with the new approach, there were still doubts about it at the ministerial and officials levels.

"So it's best for us to leave it to the leaders to discuss the matter. We will continue to pursue it nonetheless," he said.

On the signing of a framework agreement between Asean and China for the formation of an Asean-China Free Trade Area (FTA) in 10 years, the minister said some would like the FTA to be in place by 2010 while others would prefer 2012.

"Before the meeting here ends, we'll be able to know whether all the countries involved will accept 2010 or whether we are going to have a two-tier process -- 2010 and 2012," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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