

01/08/2002

PM: We will still push for Asean+3 secretariat

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed disappointment that some Asean members were against Kuala Lumpur hosting the Asean+3 secretariat but reiterated that Malaysia will continue to push for it.

"We are very disappointed that the other countries are not keen to have this secretariat but we will continue to press for it," the Prime Minister said when told that the on-going Asean Ministers meeting in Brunei had failed to reach a consensus over the proposal.

The Foreign Ministers instead preferred to have a unit within the Asean secretariat in Jakarta to ensure proper co-ordination of Asean+3 activities.

Asked on certain nations' contention, especially Singapore and Indonesia, that the introduction of an Asean+3 secretariat would render the Asean secretariat in Jakarta irrelevant, Dr Mahathir said it need not be the case.

"I don't think so. Asean is Asean ... this is Asean+3," he said, adding that it was also only the view of a very few that the proposal was a drastic move.

Dr Mahathir spoke to reporters after launching the "Family First - Bring Your Heart Home" campaign at the Women's Affairs and Family Development Ministry here.

Asean+3 is a loose co-operation between Asean, Japan, South Korea and China. Malaysia is seeking to institutionalise the framework so that a more definite framework could be established, especially in the wake of China's entry into the World Trade Organisation.

On the US proposal for Malaysia to be the Southeast Asian centre for anti-terrorist activities, Dr Mahathir said the Government would study the proposal.

"We have to know the details," he said, adding that Malaysia would remain committed in the fight against terrorism.

"We have given our commitment that we will fight against terrorism and we will keep our word."

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said yesterday that US Secretary of State Colin Powell had voiced Washington's expectations for Malaysia to lead the war against terrorism in the region since it was not only impressed with Malaysia's domestic fight against terrorism but also its role in defusing terrorism in the region, particularly in Southern Philippines.

On another issue, Dr Mahathir declined to discuss the proposal for the teaching of Mathematics and Science in English in Chinese schools as the Government was deliberating the matter.