

02 OCT 2003

Asean-Summit

COUNTER-TERRORISM SET TO DOMINATE ASEAN SUMMIT

By: Salbiah Said and Openg Onn

NUSA DUA (Bali), Oct 2 (Bernama) -- Amid tight security, leaders of South-East Asia's main regional organisation will meet here on Tuesday for their ninth summit, with counter-terrorism top on the agenda.

Indonesia, which chairs the current Asean grouping, has deployed 5,000 military and police personnel to beef up security around this popular Indonesian tourist, which is still reeling from the deadly terrorist attacks a year ago.

Indonesian troops have been conducting several joint exercises in anticipation of possible terrorist threats.

According to Indonesian National Military (TNI) Chief of Staff (General Affairs), Lt Gen Djamiri Chiniago fighter jets, four helicopters, tanks, water cannons and other hi-tech equipment were in place to ensure a trouble-free summit and safety of the delegates.

The Indonesian Navy brought in a fleet of seven warships to guard the Bali waters as part of the security measures.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda said the summit would issue the Bali Concord II, which will outline the concept of the Asean Security Community, Asean Economic Community and Asean Social and Cultural Community.

The three agendas would be a historical leap for Asean as it would form a new blueprint for the regional grouping till 2020, he said.

He said the concept of the document had been agreed to by Asean foreign ministers during their recent meeting in New York.

"There are only a few details that will be further discussed during the meeting with senior officials and ministers ahead of the summit," he said in Jakarta yesterday.

"Several other documents that will be further discussed during the meeting include those on the accession of China and India or the Asean Treaty on Amity and Cooperation (TAC), Anti-Terrorism Agreement between Asean and India, a strategic partnership between Asean and China as well as an agreement on cooperation between Asean and Japan," said Hassan.

The meeting will kick off with an informal working dinner today among Asean senior officials and their partners from China, Japan and South Korea.

Senior officials will have separate meetings for two days from tomorrow. Foreign and economic ministers are scheduled to discuss trade and security issues on Sunday.

Fourteen heads of state are scheduled to attend the summit.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the most senior Asean leader, will attend the summit, his last as Malaysia's Prime Minister before he steps down end of the month.

The others attending the summit are Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Indonesian President Megawati Soekarnoputri and Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah.

The rest include Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai and Indian Prime Minister Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee.

At their last summit in Phnom Penh on Nov 3, last year, the region's 10 leaders issued a joint declaration on joint action to counter terrorism. Since then, Asean countries have stepped up cooperation in intelligence and

information exchange.

Asean secretary general Ong Keng Yong said counter-terrorism would be an important agenda at the Bali summit, but the group would not be providing a list of specific measures.

"In Bali, the leaders' idea is that we want to set our responses to terrorism in a more strategic context to deal with the problem in a long-term way," Ong said in Jakarta recently.

"I believe many of our leaders feel that we cannot remove terrorism just like that," he said.

At the eighth summit, the leaders resolved to intensify their efforts "to counter and suppress the activities of terrorist groups in the region", including the establishment of a Regional Counter-Terrorism Centre in Malaysia.

"Before Bali, Asean was still in denial mode on terrorism," said an Asean official. "But after Oct 12, counter-terrorism is now the priority."

From the 1980's, Asean focus was on economic issues like free trade and how to integrate economies in transition into the 35-year-old group. Since a few years ago, along with coping with the 1997 financial crisis, it has been trying to deal with cross-border problems like the haze caused by forest fires.

Outgoing Asean secretary general Rodolfo Severino said Asean now has to consider terrorism in its discussions of economic growth and cooperation since "these are all tied up together".

In many ways, the terrorism label is the last thing Asean needs, especially since it risks discouraging investments and tourism the region badly needs.

The region has not fully recovered from the 1997 crisis and is trying to protect its incoming foreign investments from regional heavyweight China, expected to draw even more investments after it joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001.

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