

26 MAY 2003

Limbang-Border

LIMBANG ISSUE WILL NOT BE REFERRED TO ICJ, SAYS SYED HAMID

PUTRAJAYA, May 26 (Bernama) -- Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today that referring the Limbang issue to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is out of the question as it does not involve overlapping territorial claims between Malaysia and Brunei.

Instead, he said, among the matters to be resolved between the two neighbouring countries were demarcation of the common border and the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) which would hopefully be dealt as a package.

"Limbang in Sarawak is part of Malaysia. This can never be disputed by any party and is not the issue for debate at the negotiating table," he told reporters after a special media conference on the 'Asean-Japan Exchange Year 2003' here.

Asked to elaborate, Syed Hamid said: "We share a common border, granting us the right to maritime interests including the exclusive economic zone. As such, we're seeking an approach as Brunei is also situated in the same location.

"There're some things we're making claims to over there overlapping with their claims. Therefore we wish to resolve these and in this respect, there's a possibility that we'll adopt several approaches to enable us to resolve them in a comprehensive manner."

He said that there had been discussions from time to time between both sides with each submitting its respective proposal to settle the matter.

"But there is no outcome...we could not finalise. This time, there're certain things that we think are very attractive enough for both of us to come to an agreement. We hope we'll be able to finalise a framework agreement incorporating certain other things," he said.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei met a few days ago in Penang during which they discussed several outstanding bilateral issues.

Syed Hamid said what was important was that there was the intention on both sides to settle the dispute the soonest possible.

"The date that has been mentioned between both of them is they want to see it resolved before Dr Mahathir steps down in October," he added.

On the Asean-Japan Exchange Year 2003 of which Malaysia is the coordinator for the month of June, Syed Hamid said that 63 events would be held in this country until the end of the year.

Among the highlights are the Japan-Asean Colloquium scheduled tentatively on June 29-30 and Japan Education Fair organised by the Japanese Graduates' Association of Malaysia on June 27-28.

The exchange year programme was mooted by Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi during his visits to Asean countries last year.

Asean comprises Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam.

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