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Syed Hamid-Russia (OIC)

RUSSIA KEEN TO JOIN OIC, SAYS SYED HAMID

PUTRAJAYA, Aug 6 (Bernama) -- Russia has expressed keen interest to join the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), either as a member or an observer, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today.

However, the decision to accept Russia rests squarely on the consensus of the 56-member organisation, he said.

He said Russia's interest was brought up by its President Vladimir Putin during his two-day official visit to Malaysia beginning Tuesday since Kuala Lumpur would be hosting the 10th OIC Summit in October and would assume the chairmanship.

"When I received him (Putin) at the airport, he mentioned Russia's interest to be a member of the OIC, at least as an observer, since Russia has a bigger Muslim population (exceeding 20 million) than Malaysia.

"And Islam is one of the country's state religions," he told reporters at the Foreign Ministry.

Syed Hamid said Putin also mentioned that Russian Muslims were not immigrants but indigenous people of the country.

"I asked him to discuss the matter with the Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) and he (Putin) brought it up during his discussions with Dr Mahathir and also with Abdullah (Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi)," he said.

"As the decision on the observer status and membership is based on the consensus that has to be obtained (from OIC members), what we (Malaysia) will do is, we will consult other OIC members on this request by Russia," he said.

On Malaysia's stand on Russia's request, Syed Hamid said: "Malaysia has no problem on the basis of creating better understanding of Islam and an Islamic country.

"Moreover, there are other countries within OIC that are not totally an Islamic country, but they have become members. I think on that score, maybe constructively useful for Russia to be considered.

"But, this is not for us alone to decide. It will depend on the views of other countries (OIC members)," he said.

Syed Hamid said Dr Mahathir and Abdullah raised the matter at today's weekly Cabinet meeting.

He said Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov wrote to him on the same matter last month.

Syed Hamid said other countries have also indicated their desire to be observers and members of OIC and "I think we (OIC) need to look into that."

China and India have expressed their intentions to be part of the OIC.

Earlier, Syed Hamid received donations totalling RM100,000 from six organisations and the private sector for the construction of a mosque in Cambodia by the Malaysian Youth Foundation.

Among the donors, Penang-based Restoran Nasi Kandar Subaidah (M) Sdn Bhd and Talam Corporation, contributed RM30,000 each.

The mosque will cater for the needs of 240 Muslim families in Phum Ta Phrom, Prey Noub, Sihanoukville, about 150km from Cambodian capital Phnom Penh.

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