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'Malaysia, Brunei can resolve any issue amicably'

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PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - Malaysia and Brunei can resolve any outstanding issues in an amicable manner, without having to go to the International Court of Justice, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today.

He said that owing to the excellent bilateral and leader-to-leader relationship between the two nations, issues such as the Exclusive Economic Zone claims and the river boundary between Limbang (Sarawak) and the sultanate could be resolved easily.

"This (Limbang) was not a specific point of discussion during (Prime Minister) Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's meeting with Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah in Penang last week. That was an annual meeting between them and there were other matters which both leaders were interested in ... such as the exploitation of maritime resources in that area.

"But I think both leaders agreed that the EEZ and other issues centred around Limbang be resolved as soon as possible, and this time certain things are attractive enough for us to come to an agreement. We hope we'll be able to finalise the framework agreement and other procedures soon.

"Both leaders are of the view that the matter must be resolved before Dr Mahathir relinquishes his position later this year," he said.

Speaking after attending a media briefing of the Asean-Japan Exchange Year 2003 at Wisma Putra here, he said "micro differences" about the EEZ and other related issues would be discussed at the ministerial level before being finalised in a package, probably before October.

Responding to a question, he said the Limbang issue was not an overlapping territorial claim as such, but more of the application of maritime regulations.

"This is due to the narrow border between us. Limbang, which is in Sarawak, is part of Malaysian territory; that is not being disputed by any party and that is definitely not the issue before us now," he said.

On the establishment of the Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism, he said it would be a centre for capacity-building where workshops and seminars on counter-terrorism would be held.

"It will be open not only to those from this region but also to those outside. This idea was mooted by the US, which wanted a US-Malaysia centre for counter-terrorism but we thought that it should also be open to others.

"We will get co-operation from the US and other countries. Australia also has given an indication that it would like to be involved. We will invite experts from various countries when it comes to organising seminars and programmes ... it's not limited to Malaysia; we want to gain from the experience of other countries as well," he said, adding that the centre would be formally launched soon.

On the Asean-Japan Exchange Year 2003, of which Malaysia is the co-ordinator for June, he said 63 events would be held in this country until the end of the year.

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

The exchange-year programme was suggested by Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi during his visit to Asean countries last year.