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Hamid: No specific agenda for visits

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Malaysia has dismissed a suggestion that the visits of the leaders of Russia and Germany, and most likely France, too, to Malaysia next month are intended to form an alliance to address the post-Saddam Iraq crisis.

Foreign Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar said the visits would have "no specific agenda", but the timing was "good" in view of the present world situation.

"There is no specific agenda as we have always had strong economic co-operation with these countries," he said after launching a photography exhibition titled Between Eden & Earth: Gardens of the Islamic World at the Islamic Arts Museum here.

Tan Sri Syed Mokhtar Al-Bukhary of the Yayasan Albukhary Foundation, one of the sponsors of the event, was present.

Russia, Germany and France are among the three major countries that have strongly opposed the US-led invasion of Iraq.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder are expected to visit Malaysia soon to reciprocate the visits of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to their countries.

"French President Jacques Chirac may make a stopover in Malaysia too," he said.

Syed Hamid said it was important for Malaysia to maintain good contact with such countries as they have important roles to play in the international arena.

On the Non-Aligned Movement troika meeting in Paris next month, the minister said it would merely be a discussion among the three countries - Malaysia, Cuba and South Africa - on the crisis in Iraq.

"It is not to create a resolution of any sort," he said.

Asked about the challenging task Malaysia faces as chairman of NAM and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference in getting a consensus among member countries in dealing with the Iraq crisis, Syed Hamid said:

"NAM has no intention to reach a consensus as it has 116 countries.

The United Nations has 191 countries and it, too, cannot get a consensus. What is important now is to avail ourselves to generally-agreed principles that humanitarian aid must continue, Iraq must be reconstructed, and that the UN play a major role in the rebuilding of Iraq."

On the Asean Leaders Special meeting on the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in Bangkok next Tuesday, Syed Hamid said it will discuss the impact of the deadly disease in the region and the measures needed to be taken by Asean.