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Syed Hamid: Russia keen on joining OIC

Firdaus Abdullah

PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - Russia has expressed interest in being part of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, either as a full member or at least an observer, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today.

He said the matter was highlighted during Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent visit here as Kuala Lumpur would assume the chairmanship of the 56-nation organisation and host the 10th OIC Summit in October.

"The matter was brought up during Putin's discussions with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"Russia's request was once again discussed during our weekly Cabinet meeting today. As decisions on observer status or membership (in OIC) are based on consensus, we will consult other members of the OIC," he said after receiving a RM100,000 contribution from corporate bodies for the construction of a mosque in Cambodia.

The aid initiative is a project of the Malaysian Youth Council whose president Datuk Suhaimi Ibrahim was also present.

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

Asked if Malaysia supported Russia's ambitions, Syed Hamid said Kuala Lumpur had no objections if Moscow's participation could foster better understanding of Islam and Islamic countries.

"Moreover, there are other countries within OIC that are not totally Islamic countries but they have become members. I think on that score, maybe it would be constructively useful for Russia to be considered. But this is not for us to decide ...it will depend on the views of other members (of OIC)," he added.

Russia has a more than 20 million Muslims.

Syed Hamid pointed that apart from Russia, a few other countries with a huge Muslim population have also stated their interest in the OIC.

He refused to name the countries but China and India have lobbied to be included in the OIC.

On another development, Syed Hamid said that Kuala Lumpur will not issue a travel warning to Indonesia as the bomb blast in Jakarta did not reflect the overall security situation in that country.

He said Malaysia was instead prepared to render assistance to Indonesia, if requested.

He said as a close neighbour and member of Asean, Kuala Lumpur was more interested in restoring confidence in Indonesia.

Responding to a question, Syed Hamid said that although countries whose citizens were injured or killed in the bomb blast would be concerned, it did not give any nation the right to interfere in Indonesia's domestic affairs.

"I don't think this would give justification for any country to take pre-emptive action," he said.

He also expressed the Government's condolences to families of the bomb blast victims.

Asked if Indonesia should avoid the interference of "outsiders", particularly the US, he said it was its prerogative to decide.