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Proposal to open NAM branch offices

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - As the new Non-Aligned Movement chairman, Malaysia will propose to establish branch co-ordinating offices in Nairobi, Vienna, Geneva and Paris to improve the co-ordination of the movement's activities.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Malaysia would also activate the NAM secretariat here and the co-ordinating bureau in New York to administer the activities and intensify South-South economic co-operation among the members.

He said as the new chairman, Malaysia also planned to develop a programme to share its technical expertise in the areas of infrastructure and policy development with the member countries.

Syed Hamid stressed that these plans would be discussed with the members before they could be implemented.

"These are among our plans but our immediate concern is to create an environment that is conducive to trade and economic development among the members. We are willing to share our experience and expertise in developing the country with NAM members," Syed Hamid said at a Press conference after appearing on the Malaysia Hari Ini talk show.

Malaysia took over the chairmanship of NAM from South Africa at the movement's five-day summit which ended on Tuesday.

He added that Malaysia's chairmanship would also strengthen the Langkawi International Dialogue, the South African International Dialogue and the Caribbean International Dialogue, as many NAM members were also members of these forums.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia would also help NAM co-ordinate its activities with G-77 and G-15 countries to promote better trade and economic linkages between countries of both groupings, and to improve dialogue with developed countries.

Among other programmes that Malaysia would look into, Syed Hamid said, was one that dealt with corruption.

Asked on differences of opinion between the members of the OIC over the possibility of using "oil as a weapon", Syed Hamid said the idea was only discussed at the OIC informal meeting on Wednesday and no decision was made on it.

"If we listen carefully to the Prime Minister's (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) statement, he said the idea was discussed, but no decision was made on it, since it had to be studied thoroughly.

"I hope this thing will not turn into a polemic between the OIC countries as this will weaken the organisation and leave it open to exploitation and manipulation."

The Washington Post had reported that Saudi Arabia had allowed the United States use of its Prince Sultan airbase in the event of a war against Iraq and had pledged to increase its oil production to meet any shortage caused by the war.

In the OIC informal meeting, Dr Mahathir said that the members of the OIC had agreed to look into ways to use the Muslim world's oil wealth to its advantage, but added that it needed to be studied carefully so that it would not backfire.

In response, the US dismissed Dr Mahathir's statement, saying that it had been assured by Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) that they would continue oil exports.

Syed Hamid added that the US should not be "unreasonable" in its responses to Dr Mahathir's statement as no decision had been made on the matter.

"Where is the democracy, where is the process of open interaction? Yes, the US is the biggest power in the world, but why should people not be allowed to discuss this? I think we are now living in a world full of fear because we cannot say anything that might offend the US."