

PM to meet Bush in bilateral talks

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and US President George W. Bush will meet in this port city today on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation summit.

The meeting, which will take place soon after Abdullah arrives, is expected to focus on the US-Malaysia relationship as well as co-operation in tackling terrorism and the problem of avian influenza, among others.

Issues related to the inaugural meeting of the East Asia Summit which Kuala Lumpur is hosting next month is also expected to feature prominently.

The bilateral talk is ahead of a highly-anticipated meeting between Bush and seven Asean heads of government scheduled for tomorrow.

The seven exclude leaders from Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia as the three countries are not members of Apec.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said yesterday that Abdullah's meeting with Bush was expected to be important as Malaysia was also the current chairman of the Asean Standing Committee, the Non-Aligned Movement and the



Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

Syed Hamid said while Malaysia acknowledged the importance of the presence of the US in the Southeast Asian region, it was in the context of co-operating with countries within the region.

Abdullah is also to hold bilateral meetings tomorrow with the presidents of Chile, Mexico and Vietnam, before returning to Kuala Lumpur on Saturday.

Meanwhile, Syed Hamid, who arrived here on Monday, met privately with South Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon and Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez to discuss bilateral issues. "With South Korea, we discussed our bilateral relationship with the country and its involvement in the Asean+3 process and its President's official visit to Malaysia before the East Asia Summit next month," he

added.

Syed Hamid said he had also assured Ban that the East Asia process would not duplicate or form a threat to Apec's activities nor would it take over the role of Asean+3.

"We explained that the East Asia process will focus on geopolitical and strategic issues and that it will be out of Asean+3 scope. We gave an assurance that it will not be a confrontation to any process or establish any bloc. It is just to foster and optimise the economic benefits of these East Asian countries with India, Australia and New Zealand."

Syed Hamid will also meet with his counterparts from South Korea, Japan, Peru and New Zealand over the next two days.

At the just-ended Apec ministerial meeting, Syed Hamid said Malaysia stressed that the only effective way to tackle the threat of terrorism was to focus on the root cause of terrorism.

On the Doha round of World Trade Organisation talks in Hong Kong next month, Syed Hamid said things had reached a deadlock.

"Thus, we must not look at the talks in Hong Kong as the end. We can try to work further on the Doha round by the end of 2006, and then it will have a better chance of success," he said.