

Malaysia having second thoughts on Antarctica treaty

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ISLAMABAD: After resisting for years, Malaysia is now considering reviewing its decision not to accede to the 1959 Antarctica Treaty, which will be a boost for the local scientific community.

"The time has come. We could play a better role if we signed the treaty. Maybe we can do more if we are inside - we are going to review our position," Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said at

the 34th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers meeting last week.

Malaysia has been a leading critic of the treaty since the 1980s.

There were fears that some countries that had set up research stations to study weather patterns and wildlife were also studying energy resources and mineral deposits there.

In 1982 Malaysia raised the Antarctica issue at the United Nations regarding its governance and the

rights of the global community over its resources and some observers said several countries were unhappy over Kuala Lumpur's move.

Currently about 4,000 scientists of different nationalities are conducting research in the White continent.

Although Malaysia did not sign the treaty, its scientists continued to work closely with the Antarctica scientific community.

Between the 2000 and 2003 sum-

mer seasons, Malaysia dispatched 36 students to conduct 18 scientific expeditions, and now about 40 local scientists and postgraduate students are engaged in research works there.

Now, Wisma Putra is likely to depart from its earlier stand, especially after monitoring the latest developments in the Antarctica.

"Our scientists are inclined to sign the treaty," added Syed Hamid.

About 98% of the region covered

with ice is considered politically neutral land. The treaty and other agreements collectively known as the Antarctica Treaty System regulate its status.

Twenty-eight members of the Antarctic Treaty make decisions on development of the region and Malaysia currently enjoys an observer's status, accorded by the body in 2002. To date, 45 countries have signed the treaty. — Bernama