

Keyword: climate-change

Headline: Asian nations hold 'positive' talks

Byline: Agence France-Presse

Published Date: 02:36 PM July 21, 2011

Section: globalnation

Word Count: 424

Content:

NUSA DUA—Southeast Asian foreign ministers held wide-ranging talks with their counterparts from China, Japan and South Korea here on Thursday, ahead of a security summit involving the United States.

North Korea's nuclear program, climate change and global food shortages were among the issues discussed during what host Indonesia described as upbeat discussions despite tensions among some participants over a territorial spat.

"Just now was a very positive meeting," Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa said after emerging from the talks between the 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nation (Asean) members and their three big neighbors.

"During the course of our meeting... we took stock of the present state of Asean+3 collaboration on financial and economic issues, which has been extremely positive."

He said one of the top issues discussed was North Korea's nuclear program, and that there was support for restarting stalled six-nation diplomatic efforts aimed at getting the isolated country to give up its atomic ambitions in return for diplomatic and economic benefits

"Of course the North Korean issue was discussed in good length and it is one of the common concerns not only for countries in the Northeast Asia but also Southeast Asia," Natalegawa said.

"We wish very much to see the six-party talks revived."

Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario said other issues on the agenda included food and energy security, environmental issues and co-operation on disasters.

However he said one of the most contentious issues — competing claims between China and some Asean nations to the West Philippine Sea — was not mentioned.

This came after Asean and China agreed on Wednesday to guidelines on a potential code of conduct governing activities in the resource-rich and strategically important waters.

The agreement appeared to have eased tensions that had flared in recent months, although the Philippines continued to complain that rival claimant China had not made enough concessions on the issue.

The talks are part of a week of diplomacy in Nusa Dua on the Indonesian resort island of Bali that included an Asean foreign ministers' summit on Tuesday.

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The so-called Asean+3 on Thursday will be followed on Saturday by an Asean Regional Forum focused on security issues that groups together top diplomats from a wide range of countries, including the United States and Russia.

US Secretary State of Hillary Clinton was due to arrive in Bali on Thursday night to participate in the event.