

 KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia is still hopeful that Thailand and Cambodia, which clashed over a border issue, will be able to reach an amicable agreement soon. Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Richard Riot Jaem said Malaysia also hoped that Thailand would adhere to the ceasefire agreement it signed in February this year.

Despite calls by leaders attending the Asean Summit in Jakarta over the weekend to resolve the crisis, both Thai and Cambodian leaders have refused a truce. Following the refusal, Thai and Cambodian Foreign Ministers agreed to extend their stay in Jakarta for more talks mediated by Indonesia today. Speaking to reporters after inaugurating a Symposium on the Dynamics of Youth and Terrorism, here today, Riot said he was taken aback by the fact that the agreement, signed in February, in which he was the signatory representing the Malaysian government, was not upheld.

"During the meeting in Jakarta in February this year, all 10 countries, including Thailand and Cambodia, had agreed to the agreement. But sadly, it was not adhered to by the concerned countries. Cambodia accepted it, but Thailand did not," he noted. The agreement was violated in April, causing deadly clashes near the ancient Preah Vihear temple, killing 18 people and displacing thousands from the area. Thailand and Cambodia continue to accuse each other for starting the clashes.

"If Thailand would accept and adhere to the agreement, I think the clash will not arise," Riot added. Meanwhile, Riot said Malaysians should not take the security of the country for granted and should be prepared for counter-terrorism measures, although Malaysia is not a "high-risk country". Earlier in his speech, the foreign deputy minister noted that the youth had become an easy target for terrorists for recruitment because they were easier to manipulate and indoctrinate. He added that the youth also provided an endless supply for terrorists to carry out their deeds.

"A young person with no prior police records allows a terrorist group more operational freedom since such involvement reduces the likelihood of arrest of the more senior terrorist leaders. Young people are also, at times, given more dangerous tasks on the assumption that if they are caught, they will receive lighter sentences due to their age," he added. The four-day symposium, which started yesterday and is being attended by 42 participants, is organised by the Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism, Japan-Asean Integration Fund and Asean. -- Bernama

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