

U E563 AAE  
MAHATHIR-NUCLEAR

FROM ABDUL RACHMAN NORDIN AND LESLIE LIM *over tip.*  
NEW DELHI, JAN 31<sup>87</sup> (BERNAMA) -- ASEAN WILL WELCOME ANY MOVE BY  
THE SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION (SAARC) TO HOLD  
A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE TWO REGIONAL GROUPINGS, DATUK SERI DR  
MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TODAY.

HOWEVER, HE SAID, ASEAN WAS NOT INTERESTED IN MAKING AN  
ASSESSMENT ON THE SOLIDITY OF LINKAGES AMONG THE SAARC MEMBER  
NATIONS -- INDIA, SRI LANKA, BANGLADESH, PAKISTAN, MALDIVES, BHUTAN  
AND NEPAL.

HE WAS REPLYING TO POINTS RAISED BY MALAYSIAN REPORTERS ON THE  
QUESTION OF AN ASEAN-SAARC TIE-UP WHILE TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION  
WHETHER THE SAARC IS A SOLID GROUPING.

+WE ARE NOT INTERESTED IN MAKING AN ASSESSMENT OF THEIR LINKAGES  
BUT IT IS IMPORTANT IF, THEY AS A GROUP, WOULD LIKE TO HAVE  
DIALOGUES WITH US. I THINK WE SHOULD NOT REJECT IT, WE SHOULD  
WELCOME IT,+ HE SAID.

THE TOPIC WAS ALSO RAISED IN HIS TWO-HOUR TALKS WITH INDIAN  
PRIME MINISTER RAJIV GANDHI YESTERDAY. DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR IS ON  
THE THIRD DAY OF HIS FOUR-DAY OFFICIAL VISIT HERE -- HIS SECOND  
SINCE 1981. -- MORE  
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ASKED WHETHER ASEAN'S CONCEPT OF A ZONE OF PEACE, FREEDOM AND  
NEUTRALITY (ZOPFAN) WAS LINKED TO INDIA'S NUCLEAR-FREE ZONE IN THE  
INDIAN OCEAN, HE SAID BOTH WERE CONTIGUOUS AS THE INDIAN OCEAN WAS  
LINKED WITH THE STRAITS OF MELAKA AND THE SOUTH PACIFIC.

+IF THE WHOLE AREA IS A NUCLEAR-FREE ZONE, THEN IT WILL BE VERY  
GOOD BUT IT IS OUT OF OUR HANDS. IT IS THE BIG POWERS THAT CAN  
DETERMINE THAT,+ HE ADDED.

A UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION MADE SOME 15 YEARS AGO STIPULATES  
THAT THE INDIAN OCEAN BE A NUCLEAR-FREE ZONE. -- BERNAMA  
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