

CNS4847

R GE 19-07 00224 XC144

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Asean-human rights

KOALA LUMPUR, July 19 (Bernama) -- Malaysia today took issue over the definition of democracy -- and with it the issue of human rights -- which the developed countries of the West are trying to impose on developing countries of the East.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad rejected the notion that democracy had only one definition to the extent that political systems qualified as being democratic only when they measured up to certain particular yardsticks.

+Similarly, the norms and precepts for the observance of human rights vary from society to society and from one period to another within the same society,+ he said when opening the 24th Asean Ministerial Meeting (AMM) here.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir picked up the issue of human rights ahead of next week's Post Ministerial Conference between Asean and the European Community (EC), here at which the EC was expected to tie up the issue of trade, investment and finance with the human rights record of the member countries of the Association of South East Asian Nations. The EC had taken such a stand at its meeting with Asean in Luxembourg in May.

The Prime Minister described the linkage between the two issues as new forms of conditionalities and protectionism. -- more

♥19/07/14-23MST

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It was difficult not to perceive the motivations for linking the two as political and self-serving, he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir spoke of attempts by some labour groups in the United States to have Malaysia's trade privileges under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) withdrawn on grounds that Malaysia had violated workers' rights and freedom.

He told developed countries that if Malaysia's GSP privileges were taken away, there would be reduced investment in the country, throwing workers out of jobs.

By the same token, nobody could claim to have the monopoly of wisdom to determine what was right and proper for all countries and people, he added.

+It would be condescending, to say the least, and suspect for the West to preach human rights to us in the East,+ he said. -- more

♥19/07/14-26MST

CNS4854

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Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said Asean experience had shown that peace and security as well as democracy, freedom and stability were possible and sustainable only when the people were not economically deprived but had a stake in the national life.

For this reason, Asean countries had rightly placed a high premium on political stability by managing a balance between the rights of the individual and the needs of society as a whole.

This had enabled the region and its peoples to make great socio-economic strides as well as enhance the resilience of both, individually and collectively.

The Prime Minister also asked Asean countries to strive for a new world order that would not mean freedom from the threat of war but a world free from poverty, hunger and diseases under which countries and peoples must be allowed to maximise their potentials in ways compatible with their historical, cultural and national circumstances..

'Turning to the Cambodian conflict to which Asean had concentrated its energy for well over a decade in finding a solution; Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir reminded the Cambodian people that if they did not decide for themselves to end the country's civil war, the other parts of the region and rest of the world would pass them by. -- more

♥19/07/14-29MST

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+A Cambodia mired in perpetual turmoil while the other parts of the region and the world pass them by is a possible scenario, but we wish to prevent that from happening,+ he added.

Cambodians must first find peace among themselves before they could integrate into the regional life, he said.

But Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir was inspired by the recent truce declared by the warring factions in Cambodia which led to the formation of the Supreme National Council (SNC), a coalition of the warring factions headed by Prince Norodom Sihanouk .

Leaders of the factions who met in Beijing earlier this week elected Prince Sihanouk as chairman of the 12-member SNC. Sihanouk's peace plan calls for the four factions to disarm and the United Nations to run Cambodia with the SNC representing national sovereignty.

+We welcome this and we hope that the ceasefire will hold so that we can build upon it' a durable peace for Cambodia,+ Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said. -- Bernama

♥19/07/14-36MST