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MAHATHIR: MALAYSIA TO PRESS ON FOR FORMATION OF EAEG

Mahathir - Asean

From Syed Jamil Jaafar

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(P) Dr. M - overseas trips.

NEW YORK, Sept 27 (Bernama) -- Malaysia and Asean will press on for the formation of the East Asia Economic Group (EAEG), Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Thursday.

He said that as nations and as peoples, Malaysia and Asean had the right to associate with whoever they like and to develop.

+If the West cares for human rights, then do not deny us the right to progress to the level of the Caucasian Europeans, + he said.

+If we are denied this while the East Europeans are helped to achieve developed status, then we must conclude that colour and race still influence the thinking of the West. +

The Prime Minister said this in a speech on +Asean in the 1990's and beyond : the case for expanded Asean-based regional cooperation+ before the United States Council of Foreign Relations here.-- more

*27/09/10-59MST

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MAHATHIR: MALAYSIA TO PRESS ON FOR FORMATION OF EAEG

Mahathir - Asean 2 New York

He said that Asean's membership could expand to include the Indo-China states - Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos - in the near future as these countries began to appreciate the benefits of a free market system or at least the importance of national development over territorial acquisition.

Geographically, Myanmar was also eligible to join Asean and might be interested to do so.

Papua New Guinea had already been accorded observer status while Sri Lanka had expressed interest to become member.

+So expansions of Asean are in the cards, but what would be the benefit of enlarging the membership of Asean, + the Prime Minister said.

He said the potential new members were weak economically and the combined economic strength and political influence of the enlarged Asean was unlikely to be improved.-- more

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Mahathir - Asean 3 New York

If in fact the trade blocs of Europe and America became inward looking, the Asean group was unlikely to be able to prise open the rich markets on which their economy depended.

They might even enhance their influence in the trade negotiations in GATT (General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade).

+Consequently Asean needs to enlarge its circle of friends, if not its membership, + Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said.

+In the Far East there are a number of dynamic countries which help amplify the voice of Asean. These are China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea and Japan. +

He said these countries were also very dependent on world trade and the free market.

It would be in their interest to add their voices to those of Asean.-- more

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Mahathir - Asean 4 New York

The proposed EAEG, he said would bring the Asean countries, the potential members and the dynamic economies of East Asia together.

This would not be a trade bloc for the simple reason that their economies largely compete with each other and trade between them was very small.

The usefulness of the EAEG lay in the strength of their combined voice in the GATT rounds and in other international trade negotiations.

+Of course a self-sufficient Europe and the 'Enterprise of the Americas' can still ignore the EAEG,+ the Prime Minister said.

+But the EAEG combined market will be too attractive for Europe and America not to negotiate with.+

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the United States opposed the EAEG and were known to apply pressure on the various countries, including members of Asean. -- more

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Mahathir - Asean 5 New York (last)

The United States was especially concerned that Japan did not join the EAEG for fear that the country would dominate East Asia economically and politically.

The greater East Asia co-prosperity sphere touted by Japan in the last war was resuscitated to frighten East Asian of the possibility of Japanese hegemony.

But Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said, East Asian were mature enough to think for themselves.

+If East Asians were not afraid of Japan, why should the United States worry about it?+ he said.

He said that modern Japan had gained more through trading than through war and was unlikely to exchange the economic approach for the dubious chances of military adventures.

More likely the United States' stand was due to a desire to prevent Asian countries from achieving developed status through working together.

+If one does not know better, one would say there is a racist element in this attitude,+ Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said.-- Bernama

♥27/09/11-18MST