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Mahathir-voice

MAHATHIR'S REQUEST TO CHINA: BE PART OF A UNITED VOICE

from Abdul Rahman Sulaiman

BEIJING, June 15 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad suggested today that China assume a greater role and be part of an East Asian united and strong voice in international trade negotiations.

The prime minister said such a voice was necessary to rectify the unfair terms of trade and the pre-conditions for market access imposed upon developing countries by the West.

He made the call when he addressed about 500 Malaysian and Chinese businessmen at a business seminar at the China World Hotel here.

He said that like China, Malaysia had also found that the current international trading environment was full of pitfalls and uncertainties.

+The unfair terms of trade and pre-conditions for market access imposed upon us by the West defy understanding for they run counter to the very principles of free trade which they preach,+ he stressed.

Dr Mahathir criticised developed countries like the United States for having more often than not "found it expedient to attach conditions to trade", such as linking the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status for China to non-trade issues.

He said Malaysia had always maintained that trade issues should not be tied up with non-trade related issues such as workers' rights and tropical forest management. -- more

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He expressed regret that while the developing countries were often subjected to scrutiny, no one seemed to be watching the industrialised nations.

+Worse still, no one is able to take any action when they blatantly break their own free trade codes,+ he stressed.

Dr Mahathir explained that it was for this reason that Malaysia had been proposing that the East Asian countries should strive to have a united and strong voice in international trade negotiations and in matters that affect their economic wellbeing.

In this connection, he expressed the hope that China could assume an important role in realising the proposed East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC).

He said an active support of China would have a better chance of dispelling the unwarranted fears of some countries in regard to the motive behind the regional initiatives.

Dr Mahathir anticipated that, beyond doubt, China would rank as a very important player in the EAEC, given her desire to be a part of what is happening in East Asia; to share in the fortunes and ills encountered by East Asia; and to help in providing direction and a sense of purpose for the betterment of the political and economic wellbeing of East Asia as a whole.

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Describing the region's present stage of development as "an early phase of a dramatic transformation", the prime minister said he foresaw within the next few decades, a belt of modern industrialised nations with high standards of living, stretching from Korea, Japan, China, Vietnam and down to the Asean region.

It would be the region with the strongest economic weight in the world and the biggest market, he said.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir praised the Chinese leadership for steering the country into its present level of development.

He said China's impressive economic achievements were now the subject of much envy and had aroused much comment on the future of its role in world trade.

Two foreign magazines had predicted that China would become an economic superpower while a Third World publication had described China's resurgence as the entry of the Dragon.

Dr Mahathir said that insofar as he was concerned, it was the result of a far-sighted policy as well as the industry of the Chinese people.

He said he was happy to note that Malaysia and China had always enjoyed excellent bilateral trade and economic relations. -- more

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This growing relationship had continued to gather pace and momentum, especially since the country began its economic reforms some 15 years ago.

To date, there were more than 37 Malaysian companies which had invested in China since the implementation its "Open Door Policy" and modernisation programmes to attract foreign investments.

He said many more Malaysian companies were now negotiating with Chinese joint-venture partners to participate and invest in various projects.

He was confident that these overtures would result in some business ventures for the mutual benefit of the two countries. -- Bernama

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