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Defence-policy

MALAYSIAN FOREIGN POLICY CHANGES UNDER DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 29 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's foreign policy and its formulation were democratised since Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad came into power in 1981, a seminar on defence was told today.

ENCIK Sallehuddin Abdullah, director of training of the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR), said the policy was no longer an "elitist pre-occupation" and other ministries (rather than just Wisma Putra) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), were also involved in its discussion.

He said this in his paper on "Overview of Malaysian Foreign Policy" at the one-day seminar on Malaysian Defence and Foreign Policies -- Challenges Towards 2020.

The seminar, jointly organised by the Malaysian Strategic Research Centre and the Malaysian International Affairs Forum, was attended by more than 50 participants from the defence industry.

Sallehuddin said: "Under Dr Mahathir's administration, decision-making concerning foreign policy has become more collective in that the Cabinet is fully involved in the process. -- more

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"The (foreign) policy in the post-1991 era will no longer be reactive and muddling through as it had prior to 1981. Then the 10-year period (1981-1991) was the transition period in the search of an agenda for development of Malaysia towards becoming a fully developed nation by the year 2000."

Another innovation of foreign policy since 1981 was the conscious use of technical assistance under the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCPP) as a tool of the policy.

Under the programme, which started in 1980, Malaysia had given technical and financial assistance to many Third World countries like Fiji, Maldives, Sudan, Iraq, Tanzania, Vietnam, Cook Islands and Sri Lanka for training and attachment in fields ranging from diplomacy, central banking and civil aviation to public administration and management.

Dr Mahathir's foreign policy was also innovative in that he brought with him a style of diplomacy that was real, assertive, transparent and business-like, Sallehuddin said.

A good case in point was the South-South Cooperation where Dr Mahathir had taken an active and leading role on realising that North-South dialogue had always been rhetorical, he noted. -- more

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"Dr Mahathir has been frank, assertive and transparent telling the rest of the world why Malaysia takes an initiative in pursuing such a policy. In this, he has been successful in establishing the Group of 15 (G-15) as an instrument of South-South Cooperation," he added.

Sallehuddin said Malaysia's post-1981 foreign policy was replaced by a policy that was more planned, structured, principled and consistent as embodied in one of the challenges in the Vision 2020.

The foreign policy with heavy emphasis on economics and commerce had already, and would continue to, make Malaysia relevant as a sovereign and independent nation to be reckoned with in both regional and global terms, he added. -- Bernama

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