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Mahathir-Politics

NO CHANGE IN MALAYSIA'S POLITICAL SYSTEM, SAYS MAHATHIR

From Salmy Hashim

NEW YORK, Oct. 1 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has assured United States businessmen that there would not be any changes in Malaysia's political system or ideology once the time came for a change in leadership.

"When the time comes that there should be a change, I'm sure that change would not disrupt the even progress in the country," he told members of the US-Asean Council at a dinner here.

Malaysia, ruled by the same party since independence, had four different Prime Ministers, including himself, "and the changes have taken place without undue problem or disruptions," he said during a dialogue session.

"So don't worry about political change... we'll have leaders who will continue to accommodate foreign investors," he added followed by thunderous applause.

The dinner, at US\$250 (about RM600) per head, was attended by more than 100 businessmen and senior US officials. -- more

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They included Deputy Secretary of State Clifton Wharton and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific Winston Lord. Also present was former US Trade Representative Carla Hills.

A US investor in Malaysia said he bought a whole table at US\$2,500 (about RM6,000).

"It's worth it. We don't get to see the Prime Minister in Malaysia. So this one hour with him would be well worth it," he added.

Touching on regional trade groupings, Dr Mahathir hoped that the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) would not "mutate and turn into a trade block" protecting its members with special privileges.

He said Malaysia, a country which had been trading for the past 1,800 years, did not mind competition as long as it was fair because "there are times when we need GSP privileges."

Earlier, in his speech, frequently interrupted by applause and hearty laughter, Dr Mahathir said there was "an unfortunate tendency in the US to link trade with non-trade issues" such as human rights, labour practices, the environment and economic policies. -- more

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"The result of scrutinising these issues is to stifle trade," he added. Malaysia, which currently enjoyed GSP privileges, had experienced threats of withdrawal because of alleged restrictions on the freedom of association of workers in the electronics industry.

Dr Mahathir asserted that powerful national unions had been known to destroy the economy of developed countries.

"And when the economy is destroyed it is the workers who suffer the most," he said.

On the other hand, he said, in-house unions could do little harm as they affected only the respective companies while protecting the interests of the workers.

Furthermore, he said: "We cannot allow criticisms of our laws and policies by outsiders to disorientate and distabilise us." -- more

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"To become dynamic, vibrant and prosperous we have to shape our policy and style of administration to our local situation," he added.

Dr Mahathir also urged more American businesses, especially the small- and medium-scale industries, to invest in Malaysia.

"...it is regrettable that with the exception of the petroleum and the electronics sectors, there have been few notable investments by American businesses," he said.

Malaysia got far more investments from Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore than from the United States, said Dr Mahathir, whom American businessmen described as "an excellent salesman" for Malaysia. -- Bernama

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