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Mahathir-Apec

MAHATHIR HAS NO REGRETS FOR NOT ATTENDING APEC SUMMIT

PETALING JAYA, Nov 20 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he has no regrets for not having attended the ongoing Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) summit in Seattle in the United States.

Although condemned and belittled by certain quarters for not attending the summit, Dr Mahathir said it would not have made much difference if he had attended for it would have had no impact.

"I have no regrets. I am quite happy here, as you can see," he told reporters after opening the annual delegates meeting of Koperasi Usaha Bersatu (KUB) in Subang Jaya near here.

Responding to a question from a foreign journalist, Dr Mahathir said he could not understand why Australia seemed to be offended by his absence at the summit.

He also said that he did not agree with attempts to institutionalise Apec, moving away from the original purpose of it being a loose consultative forum working to undertake projects and programmes to liberalise regional trade within the 15 member countries. -- more

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Asked what would have made him attend the summit, Dr Mahathir said it would have been the change of attitude by the US on the Asean-led East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC).

He also said that there was a difference in the stand by the Clinton Administration towards the EAEC compared with the Bush Administration but it is "apparently not enough to convince Japan that they should support it".

If the US changes its mind over the caucus merely to have a share of the economic dynamism and market potential of East Asia "I think this is rather narrow".

They should accept Asia as an important part of the world along with its peoples and cultures for they have as much right as Americans and Europeans and should not be regarded as some strange group of people who have to conform to Western values and cultures, he said.

He said the US refused to accept the EAEC because they are not in, adding "I can't imagine the US being an Asian country. So for that reason they could not be a member." -- more

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▼20/11/17-25MST

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Dr Mahathir did not believe that the US was still unclear about the caucus after years of clear explanation by Malaysia and the other Asean member countries.

"It is very difficult for us to convince people who have decided not to be convinced," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was not against the Americans but only disagreed with the politics of the American government and, particularly, the press, adding that "... one has a different opinion of a different segment of the American population".

Asked for his views on the difference between the Bush and Clinton attitudes towards Asia, Dr Mahathir said the difference between them was still not big enough.

He said the Clinton Administration still considered China a threat in terms of security "implying that China is about to go to war with Asia." --

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"We don't look at China as our potential enemy. We look at China as a country which has a great potential for becoming an economic power," he said.

With China's wealth, he said, he was quite sure that they would spend their money to upgrade the military which was normally done by any other country which has accumulated wealth.

When asked for his reaction to the US condemnation of China's human rights situation, Dr Mahathir said he was now becoming more cynical on the issue.

"Now, especially, I have become extremely cynical by comparison to what the Serbs are doing in Bosnia. The Chinese can be regarded as almost gentle, and yet the treatment against China is out of proportion," he said.

The unwillingness of the US not to take any action against the Serbs was described by Dr Mahathir as "making a nuisance of their claim that they are concerned for human rights".

What they were concerned about most was not to get hurt, he said.

Responding to a question on whether he had met Clinton since the US president took office, Dr Mahathir said he had not met him personally but had written to him several times and Clinton had done the same on various occasions. -- Bernama

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