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Mahathir-Pacific

MALAYSIA BELIEVES IN OPEN ECONOMIC REGIONALISM IN THE PACIFIC

KUALA LUMPUR, March 22 (Bernama) ⁹⁴ -- ^(P) Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today reiterated that Malaysia is strongly committed to the objectives of ensuring that the Pacific community conforms to the imperatives of open economic regionalism.

It was essential, the prime minister said, that members of the Pacific community establish an egalitarian community, not a hegemonic Pacific community to ensure the productive community that was needed.

"We cannot accept a Pax Sinica, we cannot accept a Pax Nipponica, nor a Pax Americana ... not now and not in future," he said, adding that instead Malaysia believed in the establishment of a Pax Pacifica, a pax without an imperium, protector or an overlord.

Dr Mahathir said this in his keynote address to the participants of the three-day 10th international general meeting of the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC). The high-level meeting is attended by some heads of government and leaders of the Pacific Basin countries.

"We contribute to the Pacific interdependence and community-building when we improve our bilateral relations. We contribute when we improve neighbourly relations and foster a peaceful neighbourhood and a flourishing one," he said. He said all this have to be part of a multi-layered, multi-dimensional process of Pacific community-building.

Dr Mahathir said egalitarianism was not an illusion founded on departure from realities, but it did not deny the need for leadership. -- more

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Dr Mahathir said he believed that it was also important to ensure a Pacific community that was democratic and consensual, and that works on the basis of democratic and consensual principles, however frustrating democracy was, and however infuriatingly difficult consensus might sometimes be to secure.

He said that in fact the entire planet should be a single market place, a single trading bloc, with as few obstacles and distortions as possible to the freest and least managed exchange of goods and services.

"Can we not all agree that global free trade, like democracy with all the inherent imperfections, is by far the best option, ensuring the greatest good for the greatest number?" he asked.

The prime minister said he used to think that they all agreed that the command economy makes economic nonsense in the international economic system, just as it makes economic nonsense within the domestic economic system.

He said that there can surely be no question about the fact that economic regionalism was a reality of life that would not go away. Since World War II, more than 55 regional trading arrangements have been submitted to GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) for its examination. -- more

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Dr Mahathir said given that trade blocs were not going to go away and may even proliferate, it surely required statesmanship of the highest calibre to ensure that they will be as open as possible to non-members and that they will positively contribute to global liberalism.

"The Uruguay Round negotiations have come to something of a conclusion. We will have to wait and see just how meaningful that conclusion is.

"I happen to think that those who believe in trade liberalism will continue to have a fight on their hands against the forces of protectionism and those who believe in open regionalism, too, have a fight on their hands," he said.

The prime minister also told the more than 100 participants at the meeting that he is a Malaysian nationalist, an Aseanist, a South-east Asian, an East Asian, a globalist and a Pacifican.

He said that as a (Malaysian) nationalist, he wants to open the economy of the country even further. He said that in the last six years, the Malaysian economy had been growing at around 8.5 per cent a year.

"We must exploit all the advantages that further liberalisation and openness engenders. The entire world has to be Malaysia's marketplace and we must draw in the entire world in the making of our Vision 2020 future," he said. -- more

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As an Aseanist, Dr Mahathir said, he wishes to see the region open itself further so as to become stronger, more competitive and more prosperous. He said he is confident that AFTA (Asean Free Trade Area) will not only lower the internal barriers but also the barriers to outside economies.

He said that as a South-east Asian and an East Asian, he would like to see an open South-east Asia and the flourishing of East Asian economic cooperation and interdependence, and East Asian open regionalism, respectively.

"As a globalist, I know we must fight against protectionism, managed trade and an international command economy. We must fight for liberalisation and free trade.

"And as a Pacifican, I urge you to dedicate the PECC and your countries to the cause of open regionalism in the Pacific," he added.

Dr Mahathir said: "We of the Pacific, who generate three-fifths of the wealth on this planet, owe this to our peoples and to the rest of mankind."

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Earlier, the chairman of the PECC Standing Committee and chairman of the meeting, Datuk Dr Noordin Sopiee, said the meeting was committed to developing PECC as a forceful movement for open regionalism -- in the face of those who wish to close borders and raise the barricades.

PECC supported the right of regions to organise in non-discriminatory groupings -- whether in East Asia or elsewhere, he said.

"I speak for all of the members of PECC when I say that we are all opposed to any tendencies within any grouping to create discriminatory groupings.

I know I speak for all when I state that PECC is concerned about the tendencies of some member economies to condition trade and investment on achievement of political or ideological objectives," he said.

He said the meeting was the first post-Uruguay Round conference of the PECC and it provided member countries an early opportunity to say that what has been agreed to must advance intact.

Dr Noordin said: "We can assess the consequences of the successful conclusion of the Round. We can begin to talk of what must come after the (Uruguay) Round." -- Bernama

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