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Mahathir-Apec

MALAYSIA PREFERS APEC TO REMAIN AN INFORMAL GROUPING, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, May 23 (Bernama) -- Malaysia prefers the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) to remain an informal grouping but it will have no choice but to go along if other member countries want it to be otherwise, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said if the other Apec member countries wanted the grouping to have a permanent secretariat and have their leaders meet every year, then Malaysia "would have to allow itself to be dragged along."

Dr Mahathir was answering a question during the question and answer session after delivering a keynote address at the 27th International General Meeting of the Pacific Basin Economic Council (PBEC) here.

He maintained, however, that Apec meetings should not be institutionalised.

"I feel, at this point of time, Apec should be a loose organisation so that we can get to know each other better and even if the leaders (of Apec countries) want to meet once a while, then I think it's O.K.," he said. -- more

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"For the time being, the leaders should not meet so often (but should instead) leave it to the bureaucrats and the ministers to take care of the problems."

Dr Mahathir said when the idea of Apec was mooted, Malaysia was very concerned that the powerful member countries would impose their will on the "weak" members.

Apec, the world's biggest regional grouping, links 18 Pacific Rim countries including North America, Australia and New Zealand.

Dr Mahathir reiterated that Apec should concentrate on developing strategies to help least developed nations overcome their problems.

Later, speaking to reporters, Dr Mahathir said he will attend the Apec informal summit in Jakarta in November. -- more

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On the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC), he said there were "some reluctance" among certain countries to join the caucus. "We will continue to convince them," he added but declined to name them.

Asked when the EAEC would take off, Dr Mahathir said he was not sure of the date but he hoped it would be very soon.

To a question on China, he said he was hopeful that the United States would renew the "Most Favoured Nation" status on China.

During his visit to China recently, he was informed that China was confident the US would renew the privilege, expected to be announced next month.

On Vietnam and Cambodia becoming members of Asean, Dr Mahathir said: "We are keen to have them (as members) as soon as possible. The more we keep them out, the less they will change (develop)."

Answering a question on the so-called arms race among Asean countries, Dr Mahathir said he did not think that there was an arms race in the region.

"But, as countries prosper, they have to spend a certain amount of their revenue on arms," he added.

This, he said, should not be construed as an arms race or viewed negatively. -- Bernama

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