

PM explains EAEC concept to dispel disinformation

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has again found the need to explain the concept of the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) following what he called, a campaign of lies and deliberate disinformation on its concept.

Dr Mahathir also outlined the seven strategies of the caucus, whose set up was initiated by him.

He said the explanation was necessary as the campaign of lies and deliberate disinformation on its concept was strong.

"Let me, for the umpteenth time, explain what the EAEC is all about," he said at the First East Asian Young Leaders' Congress at the Putra World Trade Centre here. Also present was Umno Youth leader Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Tamby Chik, who is Malacca's Chief Minister.

Dr Mahathir said East Asian countries must compete against one another but they must also co-operate with each other.

"We must establish processes of co-operative prosperity with each other, especially as our competition

mounts, especially as our enormous interdependence escalates.

"This is why I proposed the idea of the East Asia Economic Group, now called the East Asia Economic Caucus," he said.

He said Malaysia opposed the creation of a preferential trading arrangement, or a free trade area, or a customs union or an economic union for East Asia.

"What we wish to see," said Dr Mahathir, "is the establishment of a loose consultative forum for East Asia. This forum should have both a regional and an extra-regional agenda."

He said in pursuit of the regional agenda, the economies of East Asia should meet at the ministerial level to discuss how to enrich regional economic co-operation.

Outlining its strategies,

he said: "In pursuit of the external, extra-regional agenda, we should discuss how we can co-operate to ensure an open, non-protectionist healthy global trading and economic system."

Secondly, he said, although regional trade was crucial, the caucus should not be confined to trade.

"There is much that can be done with regard to optimising joint development zones, trans-border investment, technology-sharing, tourism, even labour flows."

Thirdly, he said on matters related to world trade, the EAEC must be champions of free and fair trade and fourth, it must champion the cause of "open regionalism".

"If we agree to do something on regional trade, we must ensure no new or higher measure of protection and discrimination should

be introduced against those outside East Asia.

"When others decide to do something on regional trade we should act to ensure that they too adhere to the principle of open regionalism."

Fifth, he said, EAEC should aspire to be a model for true North-South co-operation and, sixth, contribute to the security and well-being on the part of all the economies of the region.

Seventh, he said, whatever co-operation embarked upon should be grounded in the principles of mutual benefit, mutual respect, egalitarianism, consensus and democracy.

"At the same time, while pursuing these ends, we should ensure that we are not confrontationalist, that we are not bullied and intimidated and that we do not damage Asean, Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation

(Apec) and other established processes.

"We should not allow others to divide the Pacific, Asean or East Asia and must not be cowed from speaking out against racism, exclusivism and attempts to create closed trading blocs," he said.

Replying to questions from the Press later, Dr Mahathir in reference to the EAEC, said he felt sometimes that there was unreasonable opposition to what was really a very harmless forum.

"Surely, the East Asians can talk to each other without the presence of the United States," he said, adding that at the recent Asean Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok, the US appeared to have softened its stand on EAEC.

"All we are saying is that we should be able to meet

and talk about our common problems.

"We are not trying to form trade blocs or to exclude others from trading in this area.

"All of us are trading nations. For us it is important to be able to trade with the whole world which is why we want free trade to be the regime for the whole world, not trade confined to certain blocs."

Asked whether the current trade war between Japan and the US would have a strong effect on Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said trade wars were not healthy for anyone.

Dr Mahathir also said that Malaysia might establish diplomatic ties with Israel if the country was sincere in wanting peace and did not continue to suppress the Palestinians like it did now.

"We believe if the Arabs

and Palestinians can establish relations with Israel, and that it is sincere... why not?

"We do not adopt such a rigid stand to the extent that we are oblivious to everything that is being done by others," he said.

But he said one of the reasons why Malaysia still did not establish relations with Israel was because of Israel's refusal to allow Palestinians to have access to Jerusalem where the Al-Aqsa mosque is located.

"Jerusalem is regarded as a holy place by the Christians, Jews and Muslims. It was administered by the Muslims before who allowed those of other religions access.

"Why shouldn't it be returned for administration by the Palestinians?" he added.