

11 JAN 1996

Mahathir-arms

ASIANS BUYING ARMS FOR OWN SECURITY NEEDS, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 11 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that while some Asian countries are arming to fulfil their legitimate security needs, others are being misled by Western arms dealers into buying their weapons.

He said these "salesmen", through their aggressive marketing, had been giving a false impression to these countries that there was an arms race in the region.

"Their salesmen point out the threats that each Asian country faces and persuade us to buy their sure fire weapons," he said when delivering his keynote address at the New Asia Forum, here.

"No sooner have we bought when they tell us that our potential enemy has better weapons and can only be countered by the new weapons that their governments have now just allowed us to acquire," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the dealers would sell their military hardware to the "potential enemy" as well, probably by telling them the same story.

"And so it goes on with more and more effective weapons being invented at massive cost and necessitating their worldwide sale to recover the financial outlay," he said.

While acknowledging that "Asians are arming", Dr Mahathir said they were only arming commensurate with the level of their economic development and to fulfil their legitimate security needs.

"They would rather not arm, but they are not reassured when, despite their independence, they are perpetually being badgered to do this and that and other," he said.

The prime minister said these countries cannot but feel threatened when powerful Asian economies were instructed not to talk to some Asian countries which were mere non-entities "because the leaders of these countries did not wear coat and tie when the envoy of the powerful called (on them)".

Dr Mahathir said that if there was a threat, it was not from Asian countries but from outside the region "and Asia knows that".

In the meantime, Dr Mahathir said, the Western media had been reporting on the so-called arms race in Asia, completely ignoring the involvement of the West in the sales of these weapons.

He said that despite the overbearing attitude of those outside the region, "Asia and Asians must never be confrontative". -- Bernama