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Mahathir-EAEC

DR MAHATHIR HURT AT OPPOSITION TO EAEC

By: Tham Choy Lin

TOKYO, March 17 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today spoke of the hurt he felt at the opposition against the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) proposed by Malaysia a few years ago but which has yet to take shape formally.

He said Malaysia had never stated that it did not approve of the United States forming the North America Free Trade Agreement (Nafta) but it was in turn told that its EAEC was not approved and was also accused of being undemocratic for licensing newspapers.

"But what about licensing for nations to come together, do we have to ask for a licence to form the EAEC and from whom do we ask the licence for nations to come together?" he said in replying to a question after delivering his speech "Towards a Stable Asia" at a Nihon Keizai Shimbun-sponsored international conference on the future of Asia.

"I think that if we believe in democracy, we should be democratic in all ways, not just in giving freedom to the press but also to give freedom to other countries to come together.

"So I feel a little bit hurt. I don't think they are being arrogant, but I think East Asian countries have every right to come together and talk to each other," he said during the lively question and answer session.

Dr Mahathir was asked for his views by a Japanese delegate who said that the US was not following the adage, when in Rome, do what the Romans do, in its presence in Asia.

Dr Mahathir repeated that the EAEC was neither going to be a trade bloc nor a military alliance.

The Prime Minister fielded six other questions including the possibility of economic cooperation between Asia and Europe or with the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.

From the outset, Dr Mahathir said trade blocs were unhealthy and open trading was preferred, be it on an individual or grouping basis.

The historic Asia-Europe summit held earlier this year was for political and trade exchanges and it would not affect APEC.

On whether Asia can be the model for the rest of the world, Dr Mahathir said he would recommend it because of the stability and economic development achieved by the region.

The tolerance among Asian countries and their own people had resulted in peace, especially in East Asia.

He drew resounding applause when he said one country should not impose its values on another and threaten sanctions if they were not followed.

Asked for his opinion on the Japan-US military alliance, Dr Mahathir questioned the need for one because it could be presumed that those outside the alliance were potential enemies.

Malaysia, stressed Dr Mahathir, was not in favour of military alliances although it had its defence arrangements with neighbouring countries based on past links and more to combat piracy. -- BERNAMA

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