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Mahathir-Dialogue

PACIFIC MUST ADDRESS ARMS CONTROL MORE SERIOUSLY, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 8 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says the Pacific must address the issue of arms control more seriously as the situation now requires a new approach to security.

"When we arm ourselves, it should only be for legitimate defence and law enforcement and, even then, to the minimum required for effective deterrence," he said in a keynote address when opening the Second Pacific Dialogue at a leading hotel here today.

"The new approach should be one in which there are no foes, only partners in search of mutual peace and shared prosperity," he added.

The two-day dialogue is jointly organised by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), Asia Pacific Policy Centre in Washington DC and Institute For Policy Research.

Dr Mahathir said Pacific nations spent no less than US\$470 billion (RM1,175 billion) on arms in 1993, close to the entire Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of all the seven Asean countries in purchasing power parity terms.

"We have the world's biggest military powers and largest military spenders in our midst. Without prejudice to their legitimate national, regional or global security interests, surely more can be done to reduce the weapons in their possession. And much more can be done to limit the invention, development and perfection of ever more sophisticated weapons of destruction," he added.

By the same token, it should be recognised that there were states in the region whose military capabilities were relatively low and quite inadequate to satisfy their legitimate security needs, and therefore their right to enhance their capabilities should not be denied.

Dr Mahathir said the hard selling of more sophisticated arms to one country would only lead to others wanting to be similarly equipped, thus, they were then blamed for indulging in an arms race while the activities of the arms-dealing nations were regarded as blameless.

On nuclear weapons, Dr Mahathir said, the region more than any other needed to implement the provisions of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty more vigourously as there could also be nuclear ambitions on the part of some regional states.

"Three of the five declared nuclear powers are in the Pacific, and this region must observe the test ban and go on to outlaw nuclear arms altogether as present technology should enable us to monitor effectively," he added.

Dr Mahathir went on to outline a few principles which he thought were absolutely indispensable in order to strengthen the foundations of mutual peace and prosperity in the Pacific.

The first was the highest welfare of the human society and its members, which was the most profound concern of state, society and religion.

"Next is mutual respect, the respect that is due for each other's values, cultures, aspirations and abilities. They are no less meaningful and important merely because they are not our own," he said.

Other principles were equality of nations, whether large or small, powerful or weak; a commitment to peace and peaceful means in building security and managing differences; interdependence, cooperation and mutual help; and the integrity to abide by the very values, norms and principles "in which we profess and declare and expect others to live by."

On economy, Dr Mahathir said some of the world's biggest and fastest growing markets for the products of industrial countries were in East Asia; as millions of Asians accumulate greater purchasing power, their demand for consumer goods and services would multiply.

Far from being a threat and challenge, the developing and reforming Pacific economies offer unparalleled opportunities for business and investment, he added.

Under those circumstance, the economies best placed to reap the greatest benefits were those of the developed world as they had the resources and the technology.

Dr Mahathir said: "It would be a grievous mistake indeed if we failed to appreciate this and chose instead to ignore Asia. Or worse, if we opted to, we can take the path of confrontation and containment."

It was no secret that Malaysia's success in overcoming insurgency and preserving harmony was to large measure due to its rapid and sustained development and the more equitable distribution of its wealth, he added.

He said: "It is in our interest therefore to promote the economic foundations of security in the region. If the emancipation of the greatest number of humanity is truly our objective, we should want every country and especially the poorer ones, to prosper.

"If democracy amd human rights are really our concern, we would promote development in every society, for democracy and human rights flourish best when the economic circumstances are most conducive."

The best assurance for sustainable security in the developing East Asian countries and in the larger Pacific region was the healthy growth of their economies, he added. -- BERNAMA