

28 MAR 1996

Parliament-Asem

US WILL OPPOSE ANY FORUM IT IS NOT INVITED TO JOIN

KUALA LUMPUR, March 28 (Bernama) -- Malaysia feels that the participation of the United States is not essential to the formation or success of any forum that is beneficial to this region, Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

In fact Malaysia felt that even without the US participation, such forums could run smoothly, he told the Dewan Rakyat, here.

Replying to a supplementary question from Abdul Rahman Sulaiman (BN-Parit Buntar), he said it was common for the US to be "suspicious or doubtful" of any forum that was established, like the Asia-Europe (Asem) meeting, if it was not invited to join the forum.

Asem which comprises 25 countries -- 10 from Asia and 15 from Europe -- had its inaugural meeting in Bangkok, Thailand, on March 1-2.

Abdullah said the US would feel uneasy everytime there was a consensus or forum which did not involve that country.

He told Bernama outside the Dewan that the US Secretary of State had once stated that the US adopted a "suspicious and doubtful" attitude towards any regional forum if it was not invited to join it.

However, Malaysia felt that any forum that was regarded as beneficial to this region should be formed and in fact could run smoothly without US participation, he said.

To an original question by Abu Seman Yusof (BN-Alor Gajah) on Asem, Abdullah said the meeting was regarded as successful in further fostering political ties and economic cooperation between Asia and Europe and the decisions made were concrete, positive and pragmatic.

He said the meeting also agreed to hold the inaugural Asia-Europe Business Forum in France this year to determine the modality to enhance inter-regional cooperation in the business and private sectors.

He said none of the countries which joined Asem was negative about the meeting although some countries were unhappy that they were not invited to join the forum.

The meeting also gave an opportunity to the leaders of Asia and Europe to get to know each other better, he said, adding that Malaysia felt that the number of Asem members was suitable.

He said that in terms of economic cooperation, Asem had stressed that any move at integration and regional cooperation should be in line with the policies and rules of the World Trade Organisation and should be open.

He said Asem had also accepted several proposals made by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad like not raising matters which are not related to investment and trade and the opening of branch university campuses in Asia and having twinning programmes with Asian universities.

He also said that Malaysia was also appointed as coordinator to conduct a study on the railway project linking Asia with Europe. -- Bernama

ARA JK