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Summit-EAEC

EAST ASIAN LEADERS PLAN TO MEET AGAIN

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 15 (Bernama) -- East Asian leaders who held their inaugural summit here have indicated that they may meet again before the Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem) scheduled in London next April.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that in view of the financial problem affecting the region, it had been proposed that the meeting between Asean and China, Japan and South Korea, dubbed the Asean Plus Three summit, be held next year or two years from now.

"However, because there is the Asem meeting, it may be necessary for the Asean Plus Three summit to be held before that," he told a news conference at the end of the inaugural summit here.

He said ministers had been tasked to look into possible dates for the next gathering to enable issues like the proposed introduction of the Euro currency to be discussed.

Dr Mahathir said it was felt that the meeting here was especially important as nearly all the countries involved were affected by currency and economic problems.

The Prime Minister said the meeting was also necessary to find out whether the Euro, European Union's single currency, would affect the Asian region.

Asked if he felt that the meeting was in fact a "de facto" East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) gathering, the Prime Minister said: " I think people are free in this free world to interpret the meeting."

He said it was obvious that those attending the meeting today were coincidentally the leaders of the EAEC, a consultative forum mooted by Dr Mahathir in 1990 which had since become an Asean project.

"But it is not the EAEC. It is just identical (members of the EAEC)," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he would not call it an EAEC meeting.

On Asia-Europe relations, it was agreed that non-relevant extrenuous issues should be brought forward, Dr Mahathir said.

He said they also agreed that no new members would be admitted to the second Asem next year but after that, the matter would be reviewed.

Dr Mahathir said China, Japan and South Korea also strongly supported the Mekong Basin project and the Asean Foundation.

The Prime Minister also said the leaders hoped that the 21st century should be "a fairer century so that the distribution of wealth will be more equitable."

He said the meeting noted that the situation facing developing countries had become worse as the 20th century neared its end.

The Prime Minister said the wealth of the Asian nations had been depleted by the financial turmoil "and this is not an achievement for the 20th century and this should not be in the 21st century."

He said there were considerable prospects for East Asia in the next century.

"So, the heads of government decided the need to study fully the implications of all that is happening in the economic, political and social fields in order to be able to figure how to make the 21st century better for the whole world," he said.

On the mood of today's meeting, Dr Mahathir said it was very good.

"We were positive about working and helping each other and resolved to tackle our problems together," Dr Mahathir said.

Asked if Japan and China responded to the global approach on the currency crisis, Dr Mahathir said: "No offer was made and nothing was asked for."

"But I do not know what will happen when Asean meets China, Japan and South Korea individually tomorrow," he said.

Dr Mahathir said there was no request made for financial assistance from China and Japan "but we only discussed solutions" to overcome the crisis. --BERNAMA

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