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Help to initiate dialogue, Dr M urges Hashimoto

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MALAYSIA has urged the Group of Seven (G-7) to initiate a dialogue with the Group of Fifteen (G-15) to ensure that decisions by the industrialised nations take into account the views of their developing counterparts.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad conveyed the message to the G-7 through Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto. Japan is a member of the G-7, which also includes the UK, Canada, Germany, Italy, France and the US.

Malaysia is the current chairman of the G-15, which groups Chile, Mexico, Peru, Jamaica, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Senegal, Algeria, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Egypt, India, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir said he was asked by the G-15 members to convey the request for such economic forum with the G-7. Hashimoto is on a two-day official visit to Malaysia, having arrived yesterday. Both Prime Ministers had a two-hour bilateral meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

Briefing reporters of the meeting, Foreign Ministry secretary-general Datuk Abdul Kadir Mohamed said Dr Mahathir had stressed the need to have dialogues between the G-7 and the G-15.

"As the chairman of the G-15 for 1997, the Prime Minister said there is a need to have such contact between both groups so that in future whatever decisions taken by G-7 would include the views and concerns of the developing countries, including the G-15 members," he added.

Kadir said usually, the G-7 would not take into account the views and concerns of the G-15 countries in any decision.

"The decision taken will always benefit the developed countries but the repercussions of the decision will always be felt by the developing countries," he said. He cited the problems Malaysia was experiencing in having to service its yen loans because of the appreciation of Japanese currency.

Asked if it would not have been better for the G-7 to ask for the views and concerns of the G-15 and other developing countries before its meeting, Abdul Kadir said this would not be effective because the developing countries would not know what the G-7 countries would discuss in its meeting.

"It is better to have a forum between both groups to address issues concerning the impact of any decision taken by the G-7 to the developing nations.

"And, we think Japan can play an effective role in realising such forum because it is the only Asian country in the group of developed nations. Japan also understands the developing countries better than any other countries in the G-7," he added.

A senior official with Japan's Foreign Ministry said at a separate press briefing after the meeting that Hashimoto responded positively to Dr Mahathir's call for enhanced contacts between the two groups, saying that this was a question that had been on his mind for some time now.

While he had not viewed this from the perspective of contacts with G-15, Hashimoto said he has always maintained the belief that the opinions and positions of Asean and other countries should be better reflected in the G-7 meetings, the official said.

Although the Japanese Prime Minister said he did not believe that Japan's efforts had achieved sufficient results, he said Japan would continue to make such efforts to better reflect G-15 views at G-7

meetings.

In order to do this, he said it was essential for Japan and Asean top echelon leaders to maintain close dialogue and contact and should hold close consultations, according to the official.

At his press conference, Kadir said Dr Mahathir was also asked by Hashimoto on his views towards China in the context of regional peace and stability.

"On this, Dr Mahathir reiterated his views that Malaysia feels the policy of friendship is better than confrontation.

"Whatever other powers do, this will not stop China from attaining prosperity. The policy of accommodating rather than confrontation should be the right way to go forward as far as China is concerned," he added.

Abdul Kadir said Dr Mahathir also explained to Hashimoto the rationale for having Asean-10, which will also include Myanmar as a member of the Association of South-East Asian Nations.

"I believe, Japan has no objection to this and probably, Hashimoto is positive to the idea," he added.

He also said Dr Mahathir expressed his appreciation for Hashimoto's visit to Malaysia and other Asean members even as Japan is in the midst of trying to ensure the safe release of several of its nationals who were being held hostage by terrorists at the Japanese Ambassador's residence in Lima, Peru.

Earlier newsreports had said Hashimoto would cancel the Asean trip to concentrate on the Lima crisis.

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