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Mahathir-South

JOIN HANDS TO FIGHT MANIPULATIONS, DR M URGES SOUTH-SOUTH COUNTRIES

By: Zulkefli Salleh

ULAN BATOR (Mongolia), Sept 11 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called on developing countries to step up cooperation to face attempts by external forces to slow down their economic growth.

The Prime Minister said countries of the South, in their efforts to develop their economies, will often find their path fraught with difficulties including those imposed by external forces.

" We in the East Asia region are only too aware of these attempts by outside forces to slow down our rapid economic growth as demonstrated by the recent attempts to destabilise and weaken certain East Asian currencies," he said.

Until and unless developing nations resist the manipulation by these external forces, they would not be able to achieve their full potential of their countries, he said in his acceptance speech on being conferred a Honorary Doctorate of Humanity award by the National University of Mongolia here.

Dr TS Gantsog, rector of the university in his citation before conferring the award, said Dr Mahathir was chosen for his contributions to foster closer relationship between the countries.

Dr Mahathir is here on the last day of his four-day official visit to Mongolia to foster closer relations and enhance economic ties between Malaysia and the former socialist nation which is moving into a market economy and seeking a share of the global economy.

Dr Mahathir also stressed on the need for developing countries to unite and speak with one voice in an era of globalisation and rapid technical changes to ensure their interests were promoted and views duly respected.

" In such a challenging environment, it is imperative that countries of the South intensify their cooperation for their mutual benefits," he said.

The Prime Minister noted that developing countries including Malaysia reckoned that "the world does not owe us a living" but they only expect mutual respect and equality.

He hoped that as the world ushered into the new millennium, it would see much more equitable distribution of wealth and prosperity and that no country should be prevented from seeking a fair share of the opportunities and the wealth of this world including exploitation of their own resources.

On Mongolia, Dr Mahathir said it was time that Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries revised their perception of the northern East Asian country as "a very remote" one.

He pointed out that it took only seven hours to fly to Mongolia while it took 13 hours to fly non-stop to London and 20 hours to New York and yet these places were not regarded as remote.

He offered Malaysia's readiness to work with Mongolia to overcome the obstacles which gave the impression that Mongolia was a remote country.

Dr Mahathir, who toured a Mongolian countryside during his visit, said that Mongolia would be a great place for tourists from Southeast Asia for its pristine beauty of the environment, clear air, glorious history and relics of the past.

" Mongolia only needs some investments in facilities to become less remote," he said.

Besides tourism, Malaysia intends to make Mongolia a distribution centre for its manufactured goods to the markets of eastern Russia and western China bordering Mongolia.

It is learnt that members of the business delegation led by Chief Executive of Malaysia Mining Corporation Tan Sri Ibrahim Menudin accompanying Dr Mahathir, were looking into other possible joint ventures in coal mining and manufacturing of consumer goods.

On the conferment of the honorary doctorate, Dr Mahathir described it as a symbol of enhanced relationship between Mongolia and Malaysia which was even more meaningful as it coincided with the 26th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Dr Mahathir leaves here today for the central Asian Republic of Kyrgyz for a three-day working visit. -- BERNAMA

ZULS TS