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Mahathir-Award

MAHATHIR BESTOWED CUBA'S HIGHEST HONOUR BY CASTRO

By: Syed Jamil Jaafar

HAVANA, Sept 27 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was conferred the Order of Jose Marti, Cuba's highest award, by President Fidel Castro on Friday for his commitment to the promotion of South-South cooperation.

The presentation ceremony was held at the Revolution Palace before a state banquet given in the Prime Minister's honour to mark his three-day first official visit to this Caribbean island nation of 12 million people.

In the citation read out at the gathering, Dr Mahathir was hailed as an outstanding statesman who has shown great commitment to the development of countries of the South.

He was also praised for bringing tremendous development progress to Malaysia over the past 16 years.

The Order of Jose Marti was created in honour of Jose Marti, founder of the Cuban Revolutionary Party in 1892 to fight for independence from Spain. The award is given to foreign leaders for their outstanding contributions and for their friendship with Cuba.

Dr Mahathir in his acceptance speech said countries of the South must stand together in a strong united front to face the various challenges confronting them.

"We are confronted with rapidly changing circumstances in which the global political and economic environments are seldom sensitive to our particular needs and interests," he said.

"With the trend towards globalisation and liberalisation of the world economy gaining momentum, we have to learn not only to adjust and adapt to such development but also to deal with the imposition of ever-increasing conditionalities by those in position of power and influence.

"The rich and powerful continue to dictate and to seek control," he said.

Dr Mahathir said as the countries of the South were weak and almost helpless individually, they needed to foster solidarity and with their collective weight, wrest for themselves the right to shape policies and decisions which affected their own survival.

Wherever possible, in the Non-Aligned Movement and at the United Nations, developing countries should speak out against injustices and not allow themselves to be dictated to.

"The goal post must not be allowed to be changed every time to the advantage only of the rich and powerful," he said.

Dr Mahathir also paid tribute to Castro, describing him as the embodiment of a leader who, against all odds, remained steadfast in his struggle to bring progress and development with dignity to his nation.

The Prime Minister, who arrived here Thursday evening, was accorded a ceremonial welcome at the Revolution Palace Friday morning.

He had a four-eyed discussion with Castro followed by a full delegation meeting which culminated in the signing of three agreements on visa abolition, trade promotion and investment protection.

Works Minister Datuk Seri S.Samy Vellu signed for Malaysia while Cuba was represented by Foreign Trade Minister Ricardo Cabrisas. -- BERNAMA

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