

02 OCT 1997

Mahathir-Uruguay

MAHATHIR CALLS FOR CLOSER LINKS BETWEEN REGIONS

By: Syed Jamil Jaafar

MONTEVIDEO, Oct 2 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called for closer links and interaction between Asean and the Latin American regional grouping MERCUSOR.

He said that such ties between regions would help keep the global trading system from dividing into exclusive trading blocks.

"This is important as there are those who have a tendency to think only in terms of backyards, who only see other regions as markets to be exploited, controlled and brought into its own fold," Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister was speaking at an official dinner hosted by Uruguay President Julio Maria Sanguinetti.

Dr Mahathir arrived in the afternoon from Santiago, Chile, for an overnight visit as part of his four-nation Latin American tour. He first visited Cuba and will leave for Argentina tomorrow.

The Prime Minister said the world had become too small for countries to retreat behind closed economic blocks led by powerful leaders who dictated terms.

He hoped that MERCUSOR and Asean would help to build bridges of trade, economic cooperation and mutual support between Latin America and Asia.

"We have much to offer each other in terms of technology, market complementarity, support and coordination at the international level on issues of common concern," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Uruguay as the protem secretary for MERCUSOR could help enhance trade and economic cooperation.

"Due to its central location within MERCUSOR, good communications and other infrastructure, Uruguay is ideally placed to offer investors and entrepreneurs from East Asia opportunities to tap a market that goes beyond its border," he said.

Uruguay with a population of only 3.2 million borders Brazil and Argentina, the two giants of South America. Its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita is around US\$7,600 (about RM22,800) but inflation is high (35 per cent in 1995). The country is rich in agriculture and has vast hydropower potential.

Dr Mahathir who made a working side trip to Montevideo while visiting Argentina three years ago had discussions with President Sanguinetti this afternoon.

He will receive the key to the city of Montevideo from its Mayor Nariano Arana Sanchez tomorrow. -- BERNAMA

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