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Asem meet may not ease Asean woes: PM

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he is not optimistic that the the Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem) in London next month will have positive implications on the economic situation in South-East Asia.

The lack of optimism, he said, is because Europe may have different views on trade liberation. Dr Mahathir said he hopes to explain the "real situation" in the region during the meeting.

"Their opinion may be different as their priority is on the freedom of trade without taking into consideration the impact. The impact is not important... it is the price we have to pay for the freedom of trade," Dr Mahathir told reporters in Kuala Lumpur.

Dr Mahathir was asked if the meeting will have a positive implication on the region after leading a delegation to Germany.

Asem, launched in 1996 in Bangkok, brings together 15 European Union leaders and 10 East Asian heads of government. The two-day Asem meeting beginning April 2, will be attended by 15 European Union members, China, Japan and Asean members excluding Myanmar.

The second summit is expected to discuss new membership, particularly India, Pakistan, Myanmar, Australia and New Zealand.

When asked if the issue of Asem expansion would be sidelined by the economic problems in South-East Asian countries, Dr Mahathir said: "We wanted to concentrate on the criteria (for membership) but others wanted to discuss the situation in South-East Asia."

On his trip to Germany, Dr Mahathir said the delegation received good response from the German multimedia and information technology companies interested to invest in the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC).

"They wanted to know the real situation... there were many question related to the investment climate. Many wanted to know if press reports were true," Dr Mahathir said, adding that he may consider one or two more promotions for the MSC if the need arise.

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