

20 AUG 1998

Najib-Asian

NAJIB: SET UP REGIONAL ORGANISATION TO REPRESENT EAST ASIAN INTERESTS

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 20 (Bernama) -- Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak today urged Asian leaders to consider setting up a regional organisation.

He said the time was right for such a regional platform to emerge which would truly represent the interests of East Asia.

He said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had proposed the establishment of such an organisation a few years ago but for some reasons the idea could not be translated into reality.

The present Asian economic crisis had given much credence to Dr Mahathir's vision, he said when delivering a luncheon talk at a seminar on "Dialogue Among Young Generations on the Creation of an Asian Community."

"I wonder what will be the situation with regards to the assault on many Asian currencies if this body has been established.

"One thing seems clear the organisation could have got us together to discuss the crisis so that we are able to take a common approach, if not a common stand," he said.

Najib said it might not be in the interest of outside powers to see East Asian states joining together economically but this could well be an opportune moment for Asian countries to think of Asia and East Asia.

"Others should not fear of this structure, just as we do not fear of the European Union and the North American Free Trade Area (Nafta). Why should people be only fearful of an East Asian creation, and not that of Europe or North America,?" he asked.

Najib also expressed confidence that most Asian economies would emerge from the turmoil with much vigour and strength.

He said Asian countries must be bold and brave to divert their economies towards a much more national agenda rather than an international one which might not necessarily be in the interests of the region.

He also said Asian states must be more sensitive to each other and try to find ways to strengthen ties -- politically, economically, socially and culturally.

"Sometimes, one gets the feeling that Asia only comes together during sporting events, such as the Asian Games and then fades away for the next few years," he added.

Some 60 participants from local universities, foreign embassies and political parties attended the seminar jointly organised by the Malaysian Strategic Research Centre and the Japanese Embassy.

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