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Mahathir-Timor

EAST TIMOR WILL BE A NEIGHBOUR, LIKE IT OR NOT, SAYS PM

LANGKAWI, Dec 2 (Bernama) -- Calling for the establishment of a refined all-Asian regional security structure, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that East Timor will be a neighbour whether they like it or not.

He said: "In view of the critical importance of keeping peace and harmony in this area, I would like to call for a refined regional security structure that will involve every nation in Asia".

"A clear and definite security structure can help save tremendous resources, minimising unnecessary duplication and at the same time fostering closer cooperation among the nations," he said in his keynote address at the opening of the Aerospace and Maritime International Conference held in conjunction with the six-day Lima '99 exposition, here.

As a close-knit community with amazingly similar cultures, values and thoughts, he said, "we in Southeast Asia are well aware that happenings in a neighbouring country will affect us and the rest of the region".

Taking this into account and realising how important it is to secure and maintain peace in this region, he said, "Malaysia has undertaken to participate in peacekeeping in East Timor which, whether we or they like it or not, will be our neighbour".

The show which attracted some 1,000 local, regional and international companies was opened yesterday by Dr Mahathir, who is still in control at the cockpit fresh after the recently-concluded general election. The maritime segment is organised by HW LIMA while the aerospace sector is being managed by LIMA Le Proton.

Dr Mahathir said in a world where mutual dependence was necessary, Malaysia cannot afford to ignore its neighbours which had given undivided support in times of need, and neighbours who shared happiness and glory in times of achievement.

He said, "it is vital to note that the peacekeeping force is not intended to interfere in another country's domestic or foreign affairs or to show one's military might.

"The intention is to bring about sustainable peace and harmony," the prime minister said.

"Any attempt made by any country to demonstrate its military might by actively supporting or undermining the political and economic well-being of another nation in the region is something to be deplored," he said.

It was reported that a token force of some 100 troops has been sent to serve with the Australian-led Interfet force in East Timor and Malaysia has expressed its willingness to deploy a contingent of at least 1,500 troops and equipment to the ensuing peacekeeping force.

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"A clear and definite structure can help save tremendous resources, minimising unnecessary duplication and at the same time fostering closer cooperation among the nations," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that China and Japan could together help ensure peace and stability in this region, something that would not only reduce wasteful expenditure on arms but would enhance intra-regional trade and investments.

He said research into peacekeeping needs should also focus not on the possibility of military conflicts between nations but should also focus on

keeping the sea lanes and airspace free of piracy and hijackings, on better search and rescue equipment and cross-border fire-fighting and on how to make transportation of goods and passengers safe.

-- BERNAMA

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