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Mahathir-Asem

ASEM ON TRACK BUT MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: E. Sivabalan

SEOUL, Oct 21 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has expressed satisfaction over the third Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem), but feels that there should be a limit to the issues to be discussed in future summits.

"It is a good meeting. (There were) not much controversy on other issues," the Prime Minister told Malaysian journalists before heading home on the final day of the two-day Asem, here, today.

The summit meeting was attended by the 26 partners of Asem, 10 from East Asia and 15 from Europe as well as the president of the European Commission (EC).

The Asian side was made up of the seven "old" Asean countries namely Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The other partners from Asia were China, Japan and South Korea.

The European member states were Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Britain and the EC.

Dr Mahathir said the leaders expressed their support to South Korean President Kim Dae-jung's peace initiative with North Korea and wanted him to continue with his efforts to bring about peace in the Korean Peninsula.

However, there was a feeling that time was not adequate for the leaders to speak on the various issues put forward at the summit, he said.

"There were suggestions that there should be a more limited number of subjects so that members will have more time to focus on a subject," he said, adding that each leader was given only three minutes to speak.

Asked what specific topics were discussed at the Seoul Asem, Dr Mahathir said they were on the World Trade Organisations's (WTO) new round of multilateral talks and globalisation.

Asked what he had raised in his three minutes, Dr Mahathir said he spoke on the international financial architecture, globalisation and about the need to put substance into the relationship between Asia and Europe.

He said there should be more trade and investment delegations and an exchange of education programmes between the two regions.

Asked on his opinion regarding the future of Asem, Dr Mahathir said that Asem should upgrade its activities.

"We must have more content, interaction between Asia and Europe like organising seminars, to have more students from Europe in Malaysia and in the other Asian countries," he said.

He said that the exchange of students between Asia and Europe, especially European students to Asian countries would provide them the opportunity to mix and interact with the Asian community and to understand their culture.

"At present, only Asians go to study in Europe where they mix with the people there and understand their culture.

"If we want to see a more meaningful relationship, understanding of each other, students from Europe should study in universities in Asia," said the Prime Minister.

"They need not only study about Asia but also other disciplines which we know our level and standard to be just the same as Europe's.

"This is vital if we want to have a meaningful relations...or else, it is only one-way," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said the leaders did not discuss the issue of new membership in Asem.

"But we agreed on the basis for new membership and one of the basis is there must be consensus before any new member is admitted," he said.

On Malaysia's relations with North Korea, Dr Mahathir said: "We always have relations with North Korea."

He said Kuala Lumpur had always looked forward to a peaceful solution to the Korean Peninsula issue.

"But whether this takes the form of a union or some form of close cooperation is left for the Koreans to decide," he said.

The Prime Minister also hit out at the International Herald Tribune newspaper for its "negative" reporting about the progress in the Korean talks.

He said the talks between South Korea and North Korea were progressing well as reported by the South Korean newspapers.

The Herald Tribune reported today that the Korean talks produced discord when French President Jacques Chirac who is attending the Asem here "appeared to scorn decisions announced here by Britain and Germany on forming diplomatic relations with North Korea".

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