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Japan to continue friendly policies

Hardev Kaur in Tokyo

JAPAN's new Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori has given an assurance that he will continue with the "helpful and friendly" policies of his predecessor towards Asean.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Mori also stated he would continue the late Keizo Obuchi's policies that were friendly and helpful towards Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to the Press after visiting the Toyota Higashi Fuji Research and Development Centre, 180.2km west of Tokyo. He test drove three new cars.

He also rode the Intelligent Multi-mode Transit System, a new medium distance, medium volume mode of transportation that combines the strength of railway and road systems by using trains like buses that run automatically on dedicated thoroughfares and manually on regular roads.

The assurance was given during a meeting the Japanese Prime Minister had with visiting Asean leaders in Tokyo on Friday. The Asean leaders together with other world leaders were in the Japanese capital to attend the funeral service for Obuchi who died on May 14.

According to Japanese media reports, Mori said that his Government planned to set up a US\$2.5 million (RM9.5 million) fund next month to promote co-operation and reduce economic disparities within the group.

In addition, Mori reaffirmed an earlier unveiled plan to launch a comprehensive aid package aimed at helping nations keep peace and advance information technology.

Mori will also "voice" Asean's concerns and those of other developing countries at the meeting of the leaders of the world's most developed countries, Group of Eight (G-8).

The G-8 - comprising the US, the UK, France, Italy, Canada, Japan, Germany and Russia - will meet in Okinawa from July 21 to 23.

The Group of 77 (G-77) Summit in Havana had authorised Chief Arthur C.I. Mbanefo of Nigeria as chairman of G-77, to present the views to the G-8.

Dr Mahathir said that since the decisions of the developed nations could affect developing countries "they must at least give us a chance to give our views". Developing countries do not intend to sit at the same table (with the developed nations) but intend to give their views.

Since the developed nations will deliberate on global issues, such as globalisation, financial flows, reforms of the financial architecture, poverty reduction, Third World debt and currency exchange rates, it is important that they obtain the views of G-77.

G-77's decisions have a far-reaching impact on developing countries even though they (developing countries) are not involved in the discussions nor are their views and concerns taken into account.

The Plaza Accord, for example, which decided on the exchange rate of the yen against the US dollar, had an adverse impact on the economies of developing countries.

Asked why he was not keen on the "Asian Century", Dr Mahathir replied this was because he did not believe in it.

"We should all be sharing things throughout the world rather than setting up blocs such as Nafta, the European Union and another grouping here. Why can't we share? There is enough wealth in the world for everybody and there is no need for anybody to take everything for himself," he added.

On the co-operation in East Asia, Dr Mahathir said while the idea of the East Asia Economic Causus (EAEC) had been pushed for a long time, there were now signs that it was being accepted.

He pointed out that Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia were coming together to co-operate "not against anybody, but for the good of the whole world".

Asked on the softening stand on the Asian Monetary Fund (AMF), Dr Mahathir said he welcomed it although there were some conditions attached to it which implied that "we must not do anything to undermine the IMF".

He said there should not be such conditions "as we are wise enough to do things that will not do damage to other people".

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