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Mahathir-Howard

MAHATHIR AGAIN TELLS HOWARD TO STAY AWAY

MELBOURNE, July 6 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has renewed his attack on his Australian counterpart John Howard, singling out Australian arrogance towards Asia.

In an interview with Greg Sheridan, 'The Australian' newspaper foreign editor in Kuala Lumpur recently, Dr Mahathir pointed to comments by Howard in which he described the jailing of Anwar Ibrahim as a reversion to authoritarianism.

"Asian countries normally don't pass judgment on others. Neither do they tell other countries how they should behave," Dr Mahathir said.

"Saying that we have now retrogressed and become authoritarian, purely because a court, an independent court, passed judgment that you don't like, doesn't reflect understanding nor consciousness for the need for diplomacy."

In his article, Sheridan said Dr Mahathir seemed annoyed that Howard had switched from a friendly to a critical attitude.

Dr Mahathir said: "Initially, of course, he (Howard) wanted to be friendly and I was open.

"We invited him and he wasn't able to come. For me now to welcome him is impossible because he passed a remark against me which I think expresses his arrogance and his belief he can pass judgments on others without examining things.

"He thinks because we are an Asian country our courts are crooked."

Sheridan said Dr Mahathir also claimed a victory in his vision for east Asian regionalism, a vision of regional organisations that does not include the United States or Australia.

He said Western countries had prevented the formation of the East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC), which he had proposed in the early 1990s.

But the recently formed Asean-plus-three body, which groups the 10 nations of Southeast Asia with China, Japan and South Korea, was the EAEC under another name.

Dr Mahathir hoped the ASEAN-plus-three group would over time become much more important than the Australian-created Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) forum.

"Apec has been doing its best not only to crush the EAEC, but also the Asean group," he told Sheridan.

"Apec has managed to split the Asean group and even to pit one Asean country against another.

"Apec's concentration is on opening up markets - that's only useful if you have things to sell.

"We don't have enough things to sell to rich markets, but they want to move in on small countries with their huge capital and snuff out local competition."

Dr Mahathir thought there was a constructive role for Australian in the region, but "not as self-appointed advisers and sheriffs, and things like that".

"If you want to be a part of Asia, you must think of yourselves as an Asian country.

"You don't go around giving advice to everyone on how to run their country when you're not doing a good job of it yourself in your own country - for example the treatment of Aborigines, the failure to admit the stolen generations."

-- BERNAMA

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