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Asem-Mahathir

MAHATHIR TO VOICE MALAYSIA'S VIEW ON GLOBALISATION AT ASEM

By: E.Sivabalan

SEOUL, Oct 18 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrives here tomorrow to attend the third Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem) on Friday to seek from the once-imperialistic European nations, a meaningful presence and participation for developing countries in global economic decision-making.

Amid the backdrop of growing international resistance to what has been termed "bad globalisation", the Prime Minister was expected to speak out on the negative aspects of globalisation during the dialogue among Asem leaders, Malaysian officials said.

Malaysia has maintained that it is not against globalisation, but wants the international community and the powers that be to ensure that it works better for the benefit of all, across nations and within nations.

As heads of state and top-level representatives arrive here for the meeting, South Korean police are bracing for possible demonstrations by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) against the so-called economic neo-liberalism and World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The Asem preparation office here even held a terror-suppression training session last month.

Similar anti-globalisation protests took place in Prague in the Czech Republic last month where world finance officials gathered for the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank.

There were also protests which turned unruly at the WTO meeting in Seattle and at a United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Unctad) in Bangkok last December.

Mahathir will get down to business on arrival where he will attend the Asean leaders coordination meeting followed by the Asean's seven plus three (China, South Korea and Japan) leaders coordination meeting to chart an Asian position.

"The Asian leaders will also pick a spokesman to inform the other side (Europe) of their position," a Malaysian diplomat said.

Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji was the first to arrive here yesterday ahead of other leaders to make an official visit to South Korea before the Oct 20-21 conference.

The gathering under the catchphrase "Partnership for Prosperity and Stability in the New Millennium" will bring together heads of state and top-level representatives of seven "old" Asean states, China, South Korea and Japan as well as the 15 member states of the European Union (EU).

The seven of the 10-member Asean are Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The other Asean members are Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

According to 1998 data, the economic size of the Asem region in GDP totalled US\$15.33 trillion with the EU accounting for US\$8.33 trillion and the 10 Asian countries about US\$7 trillion.

Asem, an idea advanced by Singapore, is a forum for countries in Asia and Europe to promote economic, political and cultural cooperation. The leaders first met in Bangkok in March 1996 and the second Asem took place in London in April 1998.

During the Seoul summit, the leaders are expected to adopt the Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (AECF) to outline Asem's vision, its fundamental principles and the objectives for the next century as well as concrete projects to be pursued.

South Korea, the current holder of the Asem presidency, is preparing a Chairman's Statement which will incorporate action plans for inter-continental business cooperation.

Asian and European leaders are expected to introduce 20 fresh projects at the summit. South Korea is expected to put forward a grand project to

establish a high-speed information network linking Asia to Europe.

Other projects include narrowing the digital divide and activating E-Commerce and increasing mutual benefits through the liberalisation of trade and investment.

Most importantly for South Korea, Asem III will be a culmination of its efforts in obtaining the support and cooperation from the international community for the consolidation of peace and reconciliation on the Korean peninsula.

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