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MAHATHIR-APEC

M'SIA DOES NOT INTEND TO PULL OUT OF APEC

By: Mohd Kamel Othman

SHANGHAI, Oct 21 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says that Malaysia does not intend to pull out of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.

"We have never thought of pulling out of APEC. We have participated in APEC and now we notice that APEC has changed its character with new players in it and more concerned with developing countries and their problems," he told a media conference at the end of the Ninth APEC Summit here today.

Answering questions from the international media, the prime minister cited how the APEC meeting this time around did not focus exclusively on market opening which used to be the main theme of all previous meetings.

"(They used to tell) that we must open markets, allow capital in, open up and let all these companies in. But (at) this particular conference, not a word was said on that," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia feels that this change in attitude was out of concern for the problems faced by developing countries.

"Malaysia feels much more comfortable with APEC now, then it was before. We are not intending to pull out," he said.

On the declaration which condemned terrorism but did not mention Afghanistan, the prime minister said what was included in the declaration showed that member economies have a common stand regarding terrorism.

"We have all agreed that each country will act in its own way. There is no compulsion on the action that we must take in order to combat terrorism and as a result, there was no necessity to talk of Afghanistan."

However, Dr Mahathir said that "Malaysia's stand on the issue was known and that was not in any way obstructive towards reaching our agreement."

As for Malaysia's stand calling for an international conference to discuss and find the root cause of terrorism, the prime minister said that he spoke to many leaders and some have agreed to identify the causes of terrorism.

During the course of discussions, he said many felt that there should not only be military offensive but also diplomatic moves to resolve problems in West Asia, which many felt was related to terrorism today.

Asked if the shooting of Israeli soldiers by Palestinian was an act of terrorism, Dr Mahathir said that "one must remember that Israeli soldiers also shoot the Palestinians and so it is a two-way thing.

"That is why Malaysia is of the opinion that United Nations observers should be stationed there to separate the combatants. Some agree with the the view but obviously others do not, so we have not made that as part of the resolution (in the declaration)," he said.

When asked by another foreign journalist that the detention of Kumpulan Militan Malaysia (KMM) members recently by the Malaysian authorities was viewed by some as the prime minister trying to consolidate his power, Dr Mahathir said: "As far as detention (is concerned), we have been detaining this people even before Sept 11. So it is not related to the Sept 11 (attacks in the US)."

"By the way, I don't have to bother people (who are) not supporting me. I have three-quarters majority in Parliament and that will stay until the next election."

"So I don't have to do anything funny in order to get people to support me," he added. -- BERNAMA

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