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CHINA-ASIA

CHINA'S EMERGENCE AS AN ECONOMIC POWER WILL CONTRIBUTE TO ASIAN PROSPERITY

KUALA LUMPUR, April 24 (Bernama) -- Visiting Chinese vice president, Hu Jintao today says that China's emergence as an economic power will contribute to Asian stability and prosperity as its accession to the World Trade and Organisation will provide broader market and abundant business opportunities to the region.

"In the next five years, a more open China will provide its trading partners with business opportunities of at least US\$1.5 trillion worth of goods," he said this in his special address organised by Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute here today.

Hu, who is in the four-day official visit to Malaysia, said that China had fully considered the needs of Asian countries when opening its huge market.

As China accelerates the implementation of the country's "go global" strategy, it would increase its investment in other Asian countries.

The vice president pointed out that China's rapid economic growth coincided with its surging trade with other Asian countries.

Citing an example, he said, China's bilateral trade with Asean countries increased to US\$41.6 billion in 2001 as compared with US\$8.0 billion in 1991.

He added that during the 1997/98 Asian financial crisis, the two-way trade retained an average annual growth of 20 percent.

Hu said that Asean has continued to enjoy a trade surplus with China, with the 2001 surplus standing at US\$5.0 billion.

"With improved living standards, more and more Chinese have travelled abroad and the bulk of them had visited countries in South East Asia," he added.

Hu said that as economic globalisation moved ahead competition among countries was likely to get tougher and China was willing to assist Asean countries in their effort to be competitive.

Referring to the Asian financial crisis, he said being "a responsible country", China had extended help to its neighbouring countries by not devaluing its currency.

"Since last year, we have continued to keep our currency stable despite a drastic slowdown in our export growth amidst a worldwide economic recession, thus playing an important role in facilitating an economic recovery in Asia," he said.

He said that what was important now for developing nations was not to compete with one another, but to meet the challenges via closer cooperation.

"China's development would be impossible without Asia, and Asia's prosperity without China."

"History has continued, and will continue to prove that China is a positive force making for an economically stronger and more stable Asia," he added.

Hu also regarded Asia as a highly dynamic continent with a great growth potential as at present it contributed 30 percent of global trade.

He realised that Asia's development had been hampered by many obstacles which needed to be addressed.

"Asia's achievement's in the past 50 years give us reasons to be confident in our future. In the surging waves of globalisation, we have the capacity to win initiative and plant our feet firmly on the ground," he

added.

The visiting vice president stressed that the top priority for Asian countries was to strengthen solidarity and cooperation and secure a steady and sustained development.

"We should base ourselves on the reality and jointly cultivate a more open and accommodating environment for a development that respects our diversity," he said.

Hu also pointed that all Asian countries should continue to honour the spirit of consensus, gradualism and mutual benefit, thus stepping up cooperation at both bilateral and regional level to strive for common prosperity.

"It is our hope that Asean play a more important role in Asia-based regional cooperation," he added.

Last November China signed an accord with the 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to establish a giant free-trade zone within 10 years.

Hu said that the 10+3 cooperation had already become a highlight of regional cooperation.

Speaking in front of a packed audience, Hu praised Malaysia's achievements and the leadership of the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad which brought rapid industrialisation.

"From the moment I set foot on the soil, I have felt its vibrant dynamism. Let me salute you for your dauntless fighting spirit and your remarkable achievements," he added.

Hu said Malaysia's success was a good example for the rest of the developing world to emulate.

He commented highly on Malaysia foreign policy of neutrality and non-alignment, its dedication to playing a unique role in the maintenance of the rights and interests of the developing countries and its willingness to help preserve peace and stability in the region.

"Strengthening the comprehensive relationship of good-neighbourliness, friendship and cooperation between China and Malaysia is the important common understanding of our two governments and it serves the fundamental interest of our two people," he added.

In keeping with the spirit enshrined in Malaysia-China 1999 joint statement, Hu said that China would keep up the close exchange between the country's top leaders and at various levels, deepening mutual understanding and trust, vigorously promoting cooperation in trade, economy, science, technology, culture and other fields. -- BERNAMA

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