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CURRENCY-ASEAN

COMMON CURRENCY FOR ASEAN WILL DO A LOT OF GOOD, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, May 6 (Bernama) -- A common currency for Asean would do "a lot of good" to the region if the regional grouping chooses to adopt it, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"It's a good idea but Europe took 20 years before they finally came around with the common currency," he told a press conference after his keynote address at the 35th International General Meeting of the Pacific Basin Economic Council (PBEC) here today.

Admitting that adopting a common currency was not an easy task, especially for Asean whose countries were more different from each other compared with European countries, he said that "even now, not all European countries accept the euro as the common currency for the region."

"The best thing for us is to watch and study the European experience to see whether we can adopt a common currency," he added.

On another note, Dr Mahathir said it was obvious that Singapore signed free trade agreements with non-Asean member countries because the island state could not not take advantage of its Asean membership to benefit from the member countries.

As for Malaysia, it has chosen to belong with the countries that it shared similar geography and culture, he said.

He said that if a country linked up with all kinds of groupings, it will become confusing and maybe non-productive.

"If everybody joins every economic zone, then we will become one whole world. It becomes meaningless after a time.

"It is meaningful for Asean countries to come together because geographically and culturally we are very similar," he said.

On competition from China, Dr Mahathir said that it was up to Asean countries to find ways to take advantage of the new found wealth in the country.

He said that although China had attracted some foreign direct investment away from Asean countries, the country should also be looked upon as a potential big market.

"It can't produce everything for itself. There is something that it needs to import, not just raw materials but also finished products."

These include paper and palm oil, he said.

Then there is the Chinese interest to travel overseas as tourists, he pointed out. -- BERNAMA

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