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Mahathir-Asean

DR MAHATHIR: ASEAN ONE OF THE STRONGEST ASSOCIATIONS

By: Rohana Mustaffa

YANGON, Aug 19 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Asean, for all its weaknesses and even failures, is still one of the strongest associations of developing countries.

"Through Asean we have reduced the kind of fruitless confrontations which normally happen between neighbours and also learnt from each other the art and science of developing our countries," the prime minister said.

He said that the Asean countries had strengthened their economies through promoting intra-Asean trade and investments and through regional collaboration had protected their industries and helped their common industries through common policies and strategies.

"In Malaysia, we believe in helping our neighbours to develop partly to save us from the spill-over effect of poor and unstable governments and partly because prosperous neighbours make good markets for Malaysian products," he told 550 participants and guests of a technology conference, here.

Dr Mahathir was delivering a keynote address at the Myanmar-Malaysia Technology Conference jointly organised by the Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (Might) and Myanmar State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in collaboration with the Malaysian External Trade Development Corporation (Matrade) and Institut Sultan Iskandar (ISI).

He is on a two-day working visit to Myanmar at the invitation of Chairman of the SPDC and Prime Minister of Myanmar Senior General Than Shwe and to reciprocate his counterpart's visit to Malaysia in September last year.

Dr Mahathir said that Malaysia honestly wanted to see the Asean region prosperous and strong in order to help them fend off the predators from outside.

And Malaysia did not subscribe to the Zero Sum game in which the country could only gain if another country lost because Malaysia believed in a Win-Win philosophy in which all parties must gain and no one should lose, he added.

He stressed that it was with this belief in mind that Malaysia had worked closely with all its neighbours and in particular those new members of Asean who, because of their past costly struggles, had been lagging behind.

"We believe that our experience in growing through foreign participation in our economy can also be the experience of all countries wishing to grow economically and we know that foreign investments will not affect our independence," he added.

The prime minister said that this was the only way for weak nations to protect themselves, by coming together to combine their little assets and forming a stronger cooperation between countries of a given region and between the regions as well, cooperation which did not diminish their national identities.

Stressing the importance of weak nations grouping together, based on the reality of the world today where opportunities for interaction by the human race had never been so great, he said that this had been exploited by some who saw these opportunities as offering them the expansion of their influence and might.

The mentality of a village bully had overcome these people and

invariably in such a world, might was right and justice and fair play invariably went out of the window, he said.

Dr Mahathir said the question of how much the weak would once again submit to the strong and how much sovereignty and independence they would retain would depend not on their physical strength but on the strategy they adopted and the common causes that they made with others who were in the same straits.

He said that the weak nations should note that even the strong were coming together to bolster themselves to be even stronger and if it was not easy for them, it would certainly not be easy for the weak countries.

In welcoming foreign investments, Dr Mahathir stressed that Malaysia itself had always remained independent in words and in deeds and it knew that foreigners would not come to the country to do charity and that they were entitled to their profits from their capital and technological investments.

The government only wanted jobs for the people and was not interested in deriving revenue for the government coffers and Malaysia had succeeded so much that today Malaysia was short of workers, he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysian workers had now become highly skilled, the managers were more competent and the country's wealth had increased that it had huge savings and sufficient capital for the local entrepreneurs.

"Today Malaysians are able to invest on their own in the very sophisticated industries which were once the preserve of foreign corporations," he added.

The prime minister drew the attention of the Myanmar government to the fact that while Malaysians hoped to be welcomed the way foreign investors were welcome to Malaysia, the government also knew that most countries expected them, as foreign investors, to respect the sensitivities, laws and religions, domestic and foreign policies of the country.

Malaysian businessmen, traders and investors would be expected to do these and the Malaysian government would ensure that they did so, he said.

Dr Mahathir did not foresee much problem in Myanmar and gave his word that the Malaysian government, businessmen and scientists would collaborate fully with their counterparts here.

He said the conference was specifically focused on technology and there would be much that both sides could do for mutual benefit, especially in establishing cooperation in biotechnology, as Malaysia and Myanmar were endowed with extremely rich resources in flora and fauna, the basis for genomics, the science of the future.

Dr Mahathir hoped that the Myanmar-Malaysia Technology conference would be a start of a series of collaboration that would take both nations to a high level of socio-economic well-being.

He said the conference bore testimony to the continued commitment on the part of the Malaysian government to the idea of prospering neighbours through economic and business collaboration.

Five working papers will be presented at the three-day conference with the theme, "Business Opportunities and Technology Collaboration Between Malaysia and Myanmar", which is attended by mainly people from the business sectors of both countries.

Among the presenters are Malaysian International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, who will discuss regional trade as a catalyst for economic growth, and Energy, Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Amar Leo Moggie who will talk on the driving economic growth in the digital age.

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