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Jealousy the reason behind rejection, says Dr Mahathir

TANJUNG MALIM, Sat. - Jealousy among some Asean nations was among reasons behind Malaysia's failure to locate the Asean+3 secretariat in Kuala Lumpur, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said some thought that its establishment in KL would sideline the Asean secretariat in Jakarta.

"This is the argument of those who are not satisfied (with the idea). There is also jealousy among Asean countries and that is why we did not get the support," he said when responding to questions during a dialogue at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) here today.

He said Malaysia would continue to try to set up the secretariat in KL.

Malaysia's proposal to set up a Asean+3 secretariat was rejected during the Asean ministerial meeting in Bandar Seri Begawan recently.

Indonesia and Singapore, in particular, did not support Malaysia's offer to host the secretariat as they claimed that it would downplay or render redundant the Asean secretariat in Jakarta.

Malaysia had even offered seed capital of US\$10 million (RM38 million) and was willing to fund the operational costs of the secretariat for the first five years after inception.

He said the idea of grouping Asean with the three economic powers - China, South Korea and Japan - was mooted 10 years ago through the proposed East Asian Economic Grouping (EAEG) to enhance the economic and political strength of East Asian nations.

"With a combined population of more than three billion, we would have become an entity that is influential and respected," he said, adding that the group could balance North America and Europe's economic power if the idea materialised.

He said there was a possibility that Asean nations would be recolonised if they were not united.

"They (developed countries) will try to colonise by controlling our economy like what happened to us when our currency was attacked (in 1997 and 1998)," he said.

He said Malaysia, realising the importance of strength and unity, had managed to pull through the economic turmoil without depending on monetary aid from foreign institutions.

To another question, he said developing countries must strengthen co-operation and exchange ideas on how to develop their nations if they wanted to defend themselves.

He said international dialogues such as the Langkawi International Dialogue (LID) could help participating countries learn from each other's experiences in development.

Malaysia, for instance, had benefited the most through LID when the national petroleum company, Petronas, bought a South African petroleum company and expanded its operations throughout Africa.

On the proposal from UPSI's Student Representative Council that he be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, he said he was not interested in winning the award as he claimed that it was normally given to "those who are against their own government. I hope no Malaysian is eager to win the Nobel Prize to topple me," he quipped.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir urged UPSI to accept more non-Malay students as it could help improve the relationship among the races in the institution.

He hoped students graduating as teachers would help the Government stop

efforts by certain quarters to sow hatred among pupils studying in religious schools.