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Mahathir-Policy

MALAYSIA TO CONTINUE LOOK EAST POLICY

By: Harlina Samson

TOKYO, Dec 12 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Malaysia will continue with its Look East Policy, which it had adopted 20 years ago, as this mechanism of co-operation has benefited the country.

The Prime Minister said he had conveyed Kuala Lumpur's intention to continue with the policy during his brief meeting with his Japanese counterpart, Junichiro Koizumi at Sori Kantei (Prime Minister's office) here this afternoon.

"We want to continue with our Look East Policy and they are willing to proceed," Dr Mahathir told Malaysian journalists covering his two-day official visit, at his hotel suite.

During the four-eye meeting, Dr Mahathir said they also discussed the setting up of the Japan University of Technology.

"The University of Technology is going forward, the progress is good. Student intake is expected to begin next year and it's open not only to Malaysians but to people from South East Asia and other developing countries," he said.

Asked if Koizumi had stated Japan's stand on the Iraq issue, Dr Mahathir said he did not but had sought Malaysia's view on the matter.

Earlier, during the dialogue session at the seminar, Dr Mahathir fielded a range of questions from the Japanese audience who were interested to hear his views on bilateral, regional, international, economic and domestic matters such as his intended resignation.

Asked why he had lately included China in the Look East Policy and what he expected to learn from China, Dr Mahathir said that what had attracted him most was China's strategy of embracing free trade system of managing its economy without giving up its political system.

"As a result China remains a very disciplined society and the Government was able to implement the economic reforms successfully.

"This is something worth watching. Had Russia done this, I think Russia would have done better than China but many countries undertake changes too rapidly and even if the changes are for the good, rapid change is disruptive," he said.

By watching China, Dr Mahathir said it would add to Malaysia's knowledge and help the country in the management of its economy.

To a question on how he viewed China's aggressive engagement with Asean, especially the proposal for a Free Trade Agreement between Asean and China, Dr Mahathir said that no one could deny the fact that China would become the economic power house of the region.

"China is a very big country, 1.3 billion people, very hardworking, very intelligent, very skillful...so China will become not just an economic power, it's going to become a big military power, as well.

"Of course this creates a lot of fear even among South-East Asian nations but we would rather try and work with China rather than confront China, confrontation is a wrong way of solving a problem...that is why we welcome the idea of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with China but it is not a full free trade agreement, there must be many exclusions, many conditions which will protect," Dr Mahathir said.

He said that a FTA with China would include many exclusions and conditions which would protect Asean members which could not possibly compete with China.

The Prime Minister said the positive combination of Asean and China

would form a huge market of about 1.8 billion people, thus transforming the region into an enviable economic force and big market, and contribute to the world economy.

"Asean would also like to have FTAs with other partners, certainly we would like to have an arrangement with Japan, with South Korea and in the end of course what we are going to have will be an East Asian Economic Co-operation," he said.

He said Malaysia and other Asean countries should examine the proposal to have a free trade agreement with China, including with other Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea, and play a meaningful role.

Dr Mahathir envisaged that the co-operation would evolve and bring the countries in the region closer, similar to the European Union, and eliminate the threat of war.

"We are not completely certain that what we predict will happen but we will work toward it," he added.

To a question on his planned resignation in October next year, the Prime Minister said he had served almost 22 years by next year and that was long enough.

"The new leadership of Malaysia, in the person of my deputy, he would be able to carry on as we have done, because we've worked together. So, I'm quite hopeful that the economy of Malaysia will continue to grow," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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