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Mahathir-China

M'SIA DOES NOT THINK CHINA WILL INDULGE IN MILITARY ADVENTURES

By: Siti Hawa Othman

TOKYO, May 21 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Malaysia does not think that China will indulge in military adventures.

"Malaysia believes that if we treat China like a future enemy, it will regard us as the enemy now and respond by arming itself to the teeth," he said.

The prime minister said this in his keynote address entitled "China -- A Challenge Or An Opportunity For Asean?" at the 8th Nikkei International Conference.

In his address themed "The Future of Asia -- Emerging China And The Changing Regional Framework", he said that a policy of trying to contain China might very well lead to the Chinese boosting their military capacity in order to match those of their potential enemy.

"History has taught us that when the military muscles are strong there is always a desire to flex them and to test their capacity. It requires but a minor incident for a full-scale conflagration to follow," the prime minister said.

Therefore, Dr Mahathir said that it was better for China to be accepted as a major economic power.

"It will be powerful but it will not totally dominate the world. The US, Europe, Japan and even Korea will provide a counter balance," he said.

Historically, he said, China had not colonised other countries. In contrast, the European countries conquered and colonised Asian countries thousands of miles away from Europe.

The clash involving China in the future, he said, was going to be economic and it would be between China and the other developed countries.

Therefore, the prime minister said, there was no reason for Southeast Asia to fear China's military might.

But establishing a mechanism for defusing potentially dangerous disputes was necessary, he said. The East Asia Economic Grouping (EAEG), he said, could provide this mechanism.

The prime minister said that opposition to the EAEG was very difficult to understand.

He said that the European Union was the product of the European Economic Community (EEC) and the most significant achievement by the EEC was not so much economic as half a century of peace it brought to Europe.

Therefore, he said, it was possible that the proposed EAEG would result in similar peace for East Asia.

The same goes for the proposed East Asia Monetary Fund as an extension of the swap arrangement which he said could do no harm to no one, within the grouping or outside it.

Today's problem, he said, was likely to be financial and the fund should contribute towards earlier solutions when member countries get into financial difficulties.

On the relationship between China and the Southeast Asian countries, the prime minister said that it was good.

He said that there were huge Chinese minorities in all Southeast Asian countries but they were loyal citizens.

Admittedly, he said, a few still would like to make these countries into extensions of China by demanding that the Chinese as Chinese be separated from the indigenous people by having a Chinese education system,

separate and segregated Chinese schools and preservation of all that is Chinese.

But these people, few in numbers, do not get the support of the majority of the Chinese who wish to live in peace with the indigenous people and do business and acquire wealth.

"We do not believe that the Chinese in Southeast Asia have any wish to contribute towards China's overseas territorial ambitions or adventures. In fact we think that they are loyal citizens and are good bridges for the economic cooperation between China and Southeast Asia," he added.

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