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MAHATHIR-FTA

ANY COUNTRY FREE TO SIGN AGREEMENT, SAYS DR M

BINTULU, May 8 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says any country is free to sign and have agreements with any other country as it is their prerogative.

"If they want to have any agreement with anybody, it is their business, not ours," he told a media conference after opening the Petronas RM16.6 billion liquefied natural gas (LNG) complex here today.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on the free trade agreement (FTA) inked between Singapore and the United States in Washington on Tuesday.

"Singapore is a foreign country, it is a free country. We do not impose anything on foreign countries. So if they want to have any agreement with anybody, it is their business, not ours," he said.

US President George W. Bush and Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong signed the bilateral free-trade deal in Washington, the first between the US and an Asian country.

Asked what impact the agreement would have on the Asean grouping, Dr Mahathir said: "As far as we are concerned, we are Asean and we are not going to allow anything extraneous to interfere with Asean grouping."

The 10-member grouping consists of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. --

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