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MAHATHIR-SUPERPOWERS

DR MAHATHIR TELLS EAST ASIA NOT TO FEAR THE SUPER POWERS

By: Jeffri Rafiee

SEOUL, Dec 15 (Bernama) -- Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad today told the ongoing East Asian Forum here not to be afraid of the super powers and not to resort to confrontations.

"We must reassure ourselves that they are sane enough to realise that Asia is too big for even the strongest of them to conquer and rule," he said in his keynote address at the forum today which had the theme "East Asian Community, Seeking Common Visions".

The two-day forum being held for the first time has brought together four former heads of governments of East Asia.

Apart from the former prime minister of Malaysia, former prime minister of Vietnam Vo Van Kiet, former president of South Korea Kim Dae Jung and former prime minister of Japan Hata Chutomu are also attending the forum.

Dr Mahathir said it was not worthwhile equipping the forces with heavy and expensive weapons.

"Instead, with the powerful economic clout that we have, we should together ensure that our rights are upheld. In the process, peace is maintained and economic growth sustained," he said.

He also called on East Asian countries to focus on economic cooperation among themselves. "We have made a good start with the Asean + 3 forums." The consultation forum on matters of mutual interest is now progressing towards the establishment of the East Asia Economic Group (EAEG).

On the future of the grouping, he said: "It is up to the East Asian countries to decide. It is their future. If others can decide what they want to do for the future, the East Asians have as much right to do so."

However, he asked the grouping not to form a NATO equivalent in the East Asian community. "We should not design a defence pact which invariably implies that we have an enemy and we want to prepare to fight that enemy. That enemy will likewise prepare to fight us."

While saying that the armed forces in East Asia should act according to their country's policies and commitment for internal security, Dr Mahathir called upon countries of East Asia to agree to reduce their armed forces and the sophistication of their weapons.

"An arms race must be avoided, by agreement," he said.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir also touched on the need for a police force for the world. "But, as in the case of national police, it must be under the control of a world civil authority.

"A police force that is independent of the government is a threat to society rather than its protector," he said.

He again lambasted parties who preached democracies and forced others to submit to their system. Without naming anybody, he said: "It is hypocritical that the very same people who are developing more efficient killing machines should also talk of human rights and justice and the rule of law.

"Democracy is about common consent, not forced submission under threat of death and destruction from pre-emptive strikes using these killing machines," he said.

If they were sincere, he said, they should accept dispute settlement by negotiation, arbitration or by submitting to an independent international court of justice. "Demanding exemption from international courts of justice contradicts the very concept of justice."

Dr Mahathir also expounded on the benefit of learning from history. "To

benefit from the past, we have to pick and choose what we want to repeat and what we want to avoid and forget."

Remembering past enmities and perpetuating them would not improve the present situation, he said. "The lessons of history is not just about knowing what had happened but knowing about mistakes which had brought misfortunes and sufferings in the past and knowing that, to avoid making the same mistakes." -- BERNAMA

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