

22 OCT 2003

MAHATHIR-WTO

DR MAHATHIR LAMENTS AT WTO'S UNFAIR TRADE DOCTRINE

By: Openg Onn

JOGJAKARTA, Oct 22 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today reiterated his displeasure at the unfair trade doctrine of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), whose agreements were supposedly about lowering the barriers to trade and ensuring that member states did not discriminate in their trade dealings.

Unfortunately, he said, rather than building a broad agricultural and industrial base which could substitute for imports, "free trade" doctrine requires countries to focus on their "comparative advantage," i.e., free competition between goods and services between the providers without regard for their size and strength.

"The result must be the ascendancy and increasing wealth of the giants of the rich and the practical elimination of the business of the poor," he said in his speech here Wednesday on receiving Distinguished Honorary Fellow Award from the ASEAN Federation of Engineering Organisations (AFEO).

The award was conferred on the Prime Minister, in conjunction with the federation's 21st conference being held today and tomorrow in this Indonesian historical city of Jogjakarta at the central part of Java Island.

Dr Mahathir accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, arrived here last night from Bangkok after attending the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting.

He said many of the ASEAN member countries are also members of the WTO but unfortunately unlike the regional grouping, which are guided by fundamental principles of mutual respect and consensus, WTO was strongly influenced by the rich nations.

In this grouping, some countries were unable to speak their mind for fear of being victimised by the superpowers, he said.

His speech was greeted with applause from the floor comprising some 600 participants.

In yet another hard-hitting broadside at the world trade body, the Prime Minister said that there would be no hope for the poor to industrialise except to provide cheap labour to the foreign giants and enhance their investment and competitiveness further.

"In the mean time, the rich will continue to subsidise their farm produce one way or another so as to compete with the produce of the poor countries not only in the rich countries but in the world market," he said.

He likened the WTO to World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), which was now being made into yet another instrument to enrich the rich and impoverish the poor.

He said, the recent WTO conference in Cancun, was described by the rich as a failure because the agenda set by the rich was not agreed to, but to the poor, it was not a failure.

"It was for the first time that the poor countries had stood up for their rights. We can celebrate. But the pressure will now be applied selectively on us to force us to break rank.

"The stick and the carrot will be extensively used. If we succumb, then the future will be bleak for us. We will be the worker bees for their queens, providing cheap labour, owning nothing and learning nothing, he said.

He said the poor member countries of WTO would earn better pay and better standards of living perhaps, but they would always be working for

others, chiefly their ex-colonial masters.

These countries could not be truly independent economically or politically with recent experience during the Asian financial crisis still fresh in the minds, he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that economic terrorists were as bad as other terrorists and they caused damage and death if not directly, certainly indirectly and their effects were much more prolonged.

The Prime Minister said nations were bankrupted and forced to submit to foreign directions, businesses were bankrupted or forced to sell out, usually to the marauding foreign companies while banks and industries collapsed.

"If the government tries to help, it is called a bail-out. Governments are accused of cronyism. All these accusations are thrown by the very people who in their own countries practise bailouts and cronyism whenever they are faced by even minor failures on the part of their own companies and funds," he said.

This include the hedge funds which destroyed the economies of the developing countries and in fact, the government bailed out the very companies in which they have personal investments, he added.

"Truly they practise double standards. It is a case of telling others to do as they are told and not as they do," he said.

He said this also applied to technical standards as well or else these weak countries may not enter their markets. -- BERNAMA

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