

04 AUG 2003

MAHATHIR-COMMUNITY

EAST ASIAN COMMUNITY SHOULD BE OUTWARD-LOOKING, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 4 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that the East Asian Economic Community should be outward-looking and see the world as its market place as well as welcoming others to its market.

"There must be no retreat behind a great East Asian economic barricade, there must be no circling of the wagon and no hiding behind great walls," he said in his speech when opening the East Asia Congress.

He also said that the East Asian political community advocated should be one that is not inward-looking, defensive or frightened.

"It must open itself to the world even as they venture forth to all corners of the globe," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that in the years ahead, the East Asian community should concentrate on building an East Asian Community of Common and Cooperative Peace and Prosperity, a community that is empowered within the region and in the wider world.

"We must seek to contribute to a sense of security and well being on the part of all the countries of East Asia not only for the strong and wealthy, but also for the weak and poor."

He said that in the process of building the East Asian community, countries should engage the widest measures of participation at all levels, governmental and non-governmental.

"Whatever the schemes for cooperation we embark upon, they must be founded on the principle of mutual benefit, mutual respect, egalitarianism, consensus and democracy," he said.

The Prime Minister said that with the cooperation, the existing peace and prosperity will be less fragile and more durable.

Dr Mahathir said after more than 10 years since he mooted the idea to form the East Asia Economic Group, the issue was now regarded as unextraordinary, logical and even natural.

Today, those who speak of such a grouping are no longer regarded as insane, foolish, delirious or the most dangerous of men, he said.

However, he said the Grouping would have to find the creativity to come up with the best and the most appropriate solution and the courage to do what that needs to be done in realising its efforts.

"We should certainly not turn away from the experience of Asean which I believe is even more directly relevant. It is so because Asean's experience provides a closer fit with regards to regional community building at a lower level of integration.

"We in East Asia will for the foreseeable future be in this phase of lower level integration, political and economic."

On the economic front, he said although East Asian countries have performed remarkably well and considered as the most reliable region in the world on world trade and economic development, they were yet without voice and clout.

He said the decision that directly determined their presence and future were made elsewhere and so it was time for these countries to empower themselves for the sake of their own future.

"We owe it to our people, to amplify our voice, to aggregate our weight and boost our clout. More importantly East Asian countries must be prepared to act.

"We must be doggedly committed to persist in the face of obstacles,

natural and man-made and at the very same time, we must be practical and patient," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was clear enough that the building of the East Asian community in the years ahead would need at least four-P's which were Principle, Persistence, Pragmatism and Patience.

Meanwhile, the three-day inaugural East Asia Congress being held here is organised by the Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute (ASLI) and being attended by participants from 13 East Asian countries.

Among the speakers at the congress are former Japanese Vice Minister of Finance, Prof Dr Eisuke Sakakibara or better known as "Mr Yen", Special Advisor to the Cabinet of Japan, Prof Kuroda Haruhiko, former South Korea Deputy Prime Minister Prof Han Seung-Soo, Singapore Development Bank managing director Dr Fong Cheng Hong.

Others include South Korea Institute of International Economic Policy director Dr Cho Jongwha, Asean Tourism Association secretary-general Tunku Datuk Seri Iskandar Abdullah and Prof Kenichi Ito, president and chief executive officer of the Japan Forum on International Relations. -- BERNAMA

WNZ MKO SD