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Mahathir-Visit

MALAYSIA WANTS GOOD RELATIONS WITH ALL COUNTRIES- DR MAHATHIR

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

PORT MORESBY, Oct 25 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad ended his last official visit overseas as Prime Minister with a firm declaration of Malaysia's stand to have good relations with all countries irrespective of whether they are small or developed nations.

"What we want is more friends and we will be safer with more friends around.

"Close relations are very important for a trading nation like Malaysia...if we do not have close relations it will be difficult for us to find new markets and also to obtain supplies from the various countries," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this to the Malaysian press corps that had been accompanying him on his official visits to Timor Leste and Papua New Guinea since Wednesday. This is his last overseas trip as Prime Minister before stepping down on Friday.

The Prime Minister who arrived here yesterday for a two-day official visit was asked why he had chosen these two countries as the last destinations to visit before his retirement.

He said soon after becoming Prime Minister 22 years ago his first visit overseas was to the small South Pacific nations of Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa.

"Hence I am ending my tenure (as Prime Minister) in the same way by making visits to these countries who have had profound relations with us than the rich countries," he said.

The Prime Minister said his visit to Timor Leste reminded him of the situation in Malaysia before it attained progress.

"We are sometimes quick to forget... when we have achieved progress, we become conceited and behave as though all this is normal and forget our poverty and the difficulty we endured in overcoming this poverty," he said.

His visit to Papua New Guinea is the third after being here in 1982, just a year after he became Prime Minister and then again in 1984 to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

Dr Mahathir said he also visited these countries to know the actual situation on the ground and to provide any help if necessary.

He said the small nations that he visited appreciated what Malaysia was doing to help them.

"The countries of Africa and the Pacific are closer to us while the developed countries are not that concerned about us except when they want to sell something to us like weapons," he added.

Dr Mahathir said Japan however had given much help to Malaysia including soft loans with repayment periods stretching sometimes for up to 40 years.

"I hope we don't become arrogant because of the development we have achieved."

On help to poor nations, he said under the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP), Malaysia was offering training facilities to poorer countries.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia did not want to be hostile to any country including developed nations.

"...but if we are condemned, criticized by them, we have the right to condemn and criticize them as they too are not that perfect and at times worse than us," he added.

Dr Mahathir, accompanied by Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali,
returns home this evening.

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