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APEC-MAHATHIR

M'SIA WANTS APEC TO REVERT TO ITS ORIGINAL OBJECTIVE

By: Arul Rajoo

BANGKOK, Oct 19 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad hopes that the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) would revert to its original purpose of formation and not stray into a security forum.

Dr Mahathir, attending his last Apec forum before he retires on Oct 31, said that the 21-member group should stick to its objective of economic cooperation and not enlarge its scope.

"Apec was formed as an economic cooperation group. But we don't agree taking away economic matters into security, military or politics, which are not really for Apec," he told Malaysian journalists.

In fact, Dr Mahathir said as this would be his last Apec gathering, he hoped that the Bangkok-meeting would give him an opportunity to bring back Apec to its original reason of formation.

"I want to explain our stand on what Apec should focus. We think it should focus on items like fair trade, equitability and not enlarging its present scope," he added.

Leaders from the 21 Apec economies, including United States President George Bush and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, are attending the Apec Leaders' meeting which starts tomorrow at the Government House, here.

Asked if there was a danger of Apec becoming a security forum, Dr Mahathir said that could happen due to the present situation.

"We know security matters are very important. But I think we should discuss it at other forums, security does not only affect certain countries, but the whole world," he added.

As such, Dr Mahathir said that a forum encompassing the whole world should discuss the matter so that decisions are made only after taking into consideration the security of all the nations involved.

To a question whether he has changed his view on Apec after being sceptical about its formation in the early days, Dr Mahathir said, "it's a fact that we cannot ignore, there is an Apec."

Malaysia, however, he said was focusing more on Asean and the Asean Plus 3, which is a forum of the 10 Southeast Asian countries plus Japan, South Korea and China.

"But Apec seems to bring in countries which are unevenly developed. And there is a tendency to have agenda of strong countries inserted into Apec. While we accept Apec's defacto existence, and we have to work with it, the important thing for us is still Asean and Asean Plus 3," he said.

Asked what Apec can do in view of the failure of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks in Cancun, Mexico last month, Dr Mahathir said that it should discuss trade problems affecting member countries.

"Apec probably can explain our stand to the WTO. Explain why developing countries reacted that way (in Cancun) if Apec agrees to the agenda more acceptable to developing countries of Apec, then take our stand to the WTO and we would have a greater club," he added.

On his meeting with the US Apec Business Coalition today, Dr Mahathir said that it has enabled him to recap Malaysia's policies, which led to industrialisation and economic growth as well as Malaysia's business friendly approach.

During the meeting, Dr Mahathir said that he was asked about Malaysia's view on globalisation and his speech at the just-concluded Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) which has sparked controversies throughout the

world.

On globalisation, he said: "We are not against globalisation but against its interpretation. Since the WTO was formed, the agenda is set by developing countries which obviously focused on areas which are of their interest and benefit them," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that Malaysia wants to put its own agenda, stressing on free and fair trade, as well as equal treatment of all countries.

On the OIC, he said that his speech on Thursday, with regards to the Jews ruling the world by proxy, was not about condemning others but how the Muslims could improve themselves.

"I explain to them what I actually said and I think they understood. I told them to read the whole text and not take any particular statement out of context," he said.

In fact, Dr Mahathir said that he also explained the issue to other Asean leaders during their working luncheon today.

Dr Mahathir also denied that the scheduled bilateral talk with his Canadian counterpart Jean Chretien today was cancelled due to pressure on Chretien not to meet him.

He said that they could not meet today because Chretien arrived late in Bangkok. -- BERNAMA

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