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Mahathir-Hub

M'SIA PREPARED TO ACT AS HUB OF EXPERTS, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: Openg Onn

JOGJAKARTA, Oct 22 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Malaysia is prepared to act as the hub to help pool the available resources in the region and develop a directory of the experts and their skills.

He said the hub could facilitate the exchange of ideas and pool resources for joint work as well as facilitate the movement of professionals within and outside the region.

"It is important that professionals take note of the latest developments and prepare for them," he said when receiving the Asean Federation of Engineering Organisations' (AFEO) Distinguished Honorary Fellow Award here.

The prestigious engineering award, conferred in conjunction with the two-day 21st AFEO annual conference which began today, is a tribute to the Prime Minister for his invaluable service to the development of the profession in the region.

Dr Mahathir said with increased liberalisation and free trade, those in the profession might find that they were dictated by others from outside the region and that the available jobs at their doorsteps were being undertaken by others and they were left to pick the crumbs.

"It is not that Asean engineers are less capable and unable to undertake the job. It is just that the collective strength is not marshalled for the collective good of the profession in the region," he said.

He said obstacles need to be overcome and this include a change in mindset, and instead of competing with each other in the region, they should pool their resources and expertise and undertake jobs being undertaken by their counterparts from the United States and Europe.

Pooling of resources would also enable them to get bigger jobs and projects both at home, within the region and outside the region, he told the 600 delegates from Asean member countries as well as observers from Japan and Canada.

In a tone and stature as the most senior statesman among the Asean leaders, Dr Mahathir advised the engineers not to view obstacles and hindrances as impediments but instead see it as challenges and to seek ways to deal with them and to move ahead.

"There is a need for a win-win solution for countries in the region and especially for the benefit of the less developed among Asean members," he said.

He said it was important that the region's capacity was enhanced and the standards improved for mutual benefit.

"The more developed members, through suitable outreach programmes, should offer transfer of expertise and technology to the less developed members in an effort to prosper your neighbour," said the Prime Minister.

With his tenure coming to end after leading Malaysia for 22 years, Dr Mahathir called for greater attachment of especially younger engineers.

He said attachment for the younger engineers should be encouraged and formalised within the region and that it should be done in a more concerted manner.

This would facilitate the matching of skills that were available and help identify skills that were needed in the region instead of having to look for them from outside, he said.

"Similarly, training of post-graduate engineers has to be harmonised and aligned to ensure that benchmarked requirements are met," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Asean engineers so trained would then be primed to mature, over time, into captains of industries and leaders of important asset-owning institutions and enterprises that would generate wealth.

Taking back delegates to the history of Asean, established on Aug 8 1967, he said it represented the collective will of the nations to bind themselves together in friendship and cooperation and, through joint efforts and sacrifices, secure for their people and for posterity the blessings of peace, freedom and prosperity.

With only five members initially, including Malaysia, the share of intra-Asean trade from the total trade of the member countries was only between 12 and 15 per cent.

"However, today we are 10 members with a population of about 500 million, a total area of 4.5 million sq km, a combined gross domestic product of US\$737 billion, and a total trade of US\$720 billion," he said.

Within three years from the launching of the Asean Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 1993, export among Asean countries grew from US\$43.26 billion to almost US\$80 billion, an average yearly growth rate of 28.3 per cent.

He said in addition to trade and investment liberalisation, regional economic integration was being pursued through the development of Trans-Asean transportation network consisting of major inter-state highways and railway networks, principal ports and sea lanes for maritime traffic, inland waterway transport and major civil aviation links.

Asean was promoting the interoperability and interconnectivity of the national telecommunications equipment and services, while the Trans-Asean energy networks, which consist of the Asean Power Grid and the Trans-Asean Gas Pipeline projects, were also being developed, he said.

Dr Mahathir said all these projects required highly sophisticated engineering inputs and he was glad that there were some 500,000 engineers of various disciplines in Asean that would help to build the grouping.

-- BERNAMA

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