

07 OCT 2003

Mahathir-Farewell

PRINCIPLES OF NON-INTERFERENCE MUST BE UPHELD, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: Salbiah Said and Openg Onn

NUSA DUA (Bali), Oct 7 (Bernama) -- Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in his farewell speech to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) today, called on the regional grouping to uphold the principles of non-interference.

"The principles of non-interference, of consensus-based decision making, national and regional resilience, respect for national sovereignty, the renunciation of the threat or the use of force in the settlement of differences and disputes, must always be upheld by the Asean countries," he said.

Speaking at a farewell ceremony after the signing of the historic Bali Concord II, Dr Mahathir said that as Asean moved forward, member countries should not disregard nor erode the principles that had kept them together.

While Asean had made notable progress, it must not rest on its laurels and the members needed to address their challenges squarely.

"To address these challenges, we need to have the political will and commitment to continue to nurture and nourish Asean into an Asean Community," he said.

"Here we can take a leaf from the process which led to the formation ultimately of the European Union," he said.

Malaysia, as one of the founding members of Asean, remained totally committed to the grouping and was confident that Asean would continue to be the cornerstone of Malaysia's foreign policy, he said.

Dr Mahathir, who was touched by Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri's remarks, described the farewell ceremony and Asean's tribute to him as an honour.

"To be honoured by my fellow leaders in Asean is indeed something special," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that after serving the nation for 22 years, the time had come for him to leave and he thanked all his colleagues in Asean for their support, assistance and friendship.

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Dr Mahathir, who is now attending the ninth ASEAN Summit, said he had had the privilege of attending most of these meetings, and all these years, he had seen many changes in the grouping.

"Asean encompasses the whole of Southeast Asia and it is one of the most successful regional organisations.

"Though in the early years, Asean was written off as an irrelevant organisation, we have proved that we are very relevant.

"How else can we explain the willingness of the countries of Northeast

Asia and South Asia to hold dialogues with us. In fact many outside the region have expressed the desire to be a member of Asean," he said.

Noting that while Asean remained open and progressive, it must continue to deepen its relations with East Asia.

He said an East Asian Community, with Asean as its core, was inevitable, noting that it was important that Asean play its role in driving this cooperation in the right direction.

In his parting words to his Asean colleagues, Dr Mahathir wished them the best in their future undertakings, and expressed his hope that Asean would continue to flourish for the benefit of all its peoples and the peoples of the world.

-- BERNAMA

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