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Mahathir-China

SOUTHEAST ASIA NEED NOT WORRY ABOUT CHINA- DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Southeast Asian countries need not worry about China as the country is unlikely to indulge in any military adventure and expansionism.

He said unless China was provoked, the fear was misplaced because in today's world, military conquest was unnecessary, costly and counter-productive.

"We do not think that China will indulge in military adventures. There is therefore no reason for Southeast Asia to fear China's military might," he said in his keynote address at the Malaysia-China Partnership Summit 2003 held at Seri Kembangan, near here.

His speech was read out by Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Abdul Razak who represented the Prime Minister at the two-day summit which ends tomorrow.

However, Dr Mahathir said establishing a mechanism, such as the East Asia Economic Grouping (EAEG) which was mooted during the state visit of China's then Prime Minister Li Peng to Kuala Lumpur in December 1990 was necessary for defusing any potentially dangerous disputes.

Dr Mahathir said the EAEG could help resolve challenges and create opportunities for Southeast Asian countries to benefit from China's prosperity and stability.

"Not only China will be a great market for the products and services of Southeast Asia but also there will be a lot of Chinese investment in Southeast Asia," he added.

The Prime Minister said half a billion Southeast Asians would also become a huge market for China's product and services.

"The only thing that Southeast Asia need to worry is the attitude they take vis-a-vis China.

"If Southeast Asia participates in trying to contain China then an atmosphere of confrontation will develop and much will be wasted on preparation for conflicts. Southeast Asia will certainly stand to lose in the ensuing tension," said Dr Mahathir.

Dr Mahathir said the emergence of China as an economic powerhouse should not worry Southeast Asian countries as there would be challenges and opportunities.

He said Southeast Asian countries had to learn to manage the challenges and seize the opportunities.

"The chances are that at worst a balance will be attained but with astuteness Southeast Asia will benefit more from the opening up of the ever-richer China market," he said.

The Prime Minister also said Malaysia would keep up the close exchanges between the top leaders at various levels and deepen the mutual understanding, trust and vigorously promote co-operation with China in trade, economy, science, technology, culture and education.

Dr Mahathir said the establishment and official launching of the Malaysia-China Business Council two days ago by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in Beijing was significant.

The council could certainly be used as a conduit to further enhance bilateral business and economic co-operation, he added.

"We are hopeful that with its establishment, both countries can further develop their human resources, information and communications technology,

small and medium enterprises, agribusiness, healthcare services and other trade or investment activities," he said.

-- BERNAMA

AT AHH AAM