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Dr Mahathir: We should join Antarctic treaty

PENANG, Mon. - Malaysia's continued participation in Antarctic research will have greater meaning if the country becomes a member of the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS), former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Stating that the stage had been set for the Government to decide whether to join the ATS or otherwise, he said the current agreement under which the country participated as a non-treaty member was "not satisfactory".

"This is especially so, if the Malaysian Antarctic Research Programme (MARP) is to be expanded into the Ninth Malaysia Plan," he added in a keynote address at the 2nd Malaysian International Seminar on Antarctica here.

"As a developing country, Malaysia has taken a diplomatic position on the question of Antarctica in the United Nations. Malaysia has also shown that through bilateral co-operation with ATS member countries, a developing country can participate in research in Antarctica."

The ATS is a network of international instruments including the Antarctic Treaty. The treaty was signed in December, 1959, in Washington, DC, and its aim is "to ensure that Antarctica is used for peaceful purposes, for international co-operation in scientific research, and does not become the scene or object of international discord."

In the address, "Policies on Antarctica: Role of Developing Countries", he said the initial thrust of Malaysia's foray into Antarctic affairs, such as the demand that it serve as a common heritage for mankind, may not have succeeded.

"But today, the countries which initially claimed chunks of Antarctica for themselves are less vehement about sovereignty. There is also general agreement that the resources of Antarctica should not be exploited," he added.

"There are countries which have indicated their opposition to such a treaty. Rogue nations may yet try to extract the oil and other resources in which Antarctica is rich," he said.

The three-day international seminar is organised by Universiti Sains Malaysia and the Malaysian Academy of Sciences.

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