

Asean is still relevant, says Dr M

'Countries in this region must also strive for greater cooperation'

PHNOM PENH: Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad says Asean remains a relevant regional grouping in the world and should continue to strengthen its cooperation in facing challenges and the influence of the superpowers.

He said many might claim today's Asean was not as active as before but they could not deny the fact the 10-member economic bloc was among the few regional groupings which had survived so far.

"If one of us (Asean member countries) goes into international negotiation it will not carry much weight and strength. Therefore, it is better we have discussions as Asean and go as a group representing all 10-member countries.

"Asean is one of the few peaceful and stable regions in the world because we work together for the greater good.

"Asean is still very relevant and I hope it will continue to strengthen itself with greater cooperation among its member countries," he said yesterday.

Dr Mahathir, who is on a three-day official visit to Cambodia starting yesterday, was speaking at a dialogue session on "Balancing Relations with the Superpowers in the Context of Asean" at the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) here.

Also present were Foreign Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Darell Leiking and

RUPP's rector Dr Chet Chealy.

When asked about the possibility of Asean member countries leaving the bloc just like the United Kingdom leaving the European Union (EU), Dr Mahathir said: 'I don't think it will happen.'

He said Asean was an association of countries which retain its identity and own way of doing things but the bloc would make common stands for trade.

"We are a loose association of countries. We live in peace and prosperity for all," he said.

On the ongoing trade war between the United States and China, Dr Mahathir said it was a waste of time, money and a "very unproductive" act.

Describing the trade war as silly, he said the United States and China should try to negotiate or have arbitration and settle things in the court of law.

"The trade war is not in accordance with the rule of law.

"So, I hope those who preach democracy and the rule of law should also abide by the same rule they propose for other countries," he said.

Meanwhile, Dr Mahathir was also conferred an Honorary Fellowship Award by RUPP for his outstanding achievement over the decades for the betterment of the world and the modernisation of Malaysia. — Bernama



Top class welcome: Dr Mahathir and the Malaysian delegation arriving at the Phnom Penh International Airport. The Prime Minister last visited Cambodia in 1994. — Bernama