

Strong ASEAN-China Ties Key To Regional Peace - Ahmad Zahid

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By Ahmad Fuad Yahya

LONDON, Nov 11 (Bernama) -- Malaysia views strong ASEAN-China relations as key to regional peace and prosperity in Southeast Asia, Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamdi said.

The Deputy Prime Minister, however, emphasised that ASEAN member countries must intensify efforts in confidence-building measures and conflict resolution strategies to avoid any accidental conflict in the already very crowded South China Sea.

"What we are witnessing today is in some ways a re-balancing of global equilibrium. If we look back 500 years to the 16th century, Asia not only accounted for the majority of the world's population, as it still does today, but also contributed to nearly 50 per cent of world trade.

"The apparent return to such a state of affairs will of necessity require a fundamental rethink of current policies and practices," he said when delivering a keynote address at the Seventh World Chinese Economic Summit here today.

The summit is organised by the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute and the Asia House.

In his speech, themed 'Deepening China-ASEAN Relations: Towards Shared Prosperity', Ahmad Zahid said regional communities could no longer act in unilateral self interest or maintain a cold war "us against them" mindset in their international engagements.

"Collaboration is key if conflict is to be avoided. Openness and transparency in our dealings with one another will be vital," said Ahmad Zaid, who is on the last day of a four-day visit to the United Kingdom.

He said Malaysia, like other ASEAN countries, has an important role to play as a gateway in the balancing of global trade flows with China, as envisioned by China's One Belt One Road initiative.

"As chair of both ASEAN and China-ASEAN Summit later this month, I am confident that Malaysia will be successful in guiding ASEAN and enhance its bilateral ties with China, as well as focusing on economic integration, and communicating our pro-enterprise, investor friendly sentiment to our neighbours,' he said.

The Deputy Prime Minister also said that as a member of a global team, it was clear that Malaysia's efforts at international co-operation do not cease with China or for that matter with fellow ASEAN nations.

"As we are moving towards Trans Pacific Partnership we will also see the ASEAN Economic Community formally come into effect, a free trading bloc which both my fellow members and I see reaching out to partners in both West and East," he said.

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