

**Malaysia, ASEAN must be vigilant against big power involvement in the region - Dr M  
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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 23 (Bernama) -- Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said that big power rivalry and foreign interference swirling around the Middle East is yet another reminder why Malaysia and ASEAN must be forever vigilant against big power involvement in the region.

The prime minister said if Malaysia and ASEAN were not careful, the same fate that had befallen the Middle East could overtake as well with the same predictable consequences.

"Countries in the region will be forced to buy ever-increasing amounts of weapons from the big powers so that they can fight each other, resulting in big power and foreign countries gaining profits while ASEAN becomes progressively impoverished and unstable.

"We are already beginning to see the seeds of confrontation and rivalry in our region. Lines are being drawn. Bases are being built. Armadas are being readied. The pressure is on to take sides, " he said during "Stand With Yemen" Symposium and Photo Exhibition here today.

His speech text was read out by Foreign Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would work with friends in ASEAN to upgrade existing regional frameworks to ensure that the region leaves no room for big power intervention and to ensure that the growing rivalry between the United States and China does not lead to regional fractures.

"Malaysia has always put its hopes on non-alignment, on being open and friendly to all

countries. We will not take sides in big power rivalries and neither will we rely on military alliances or strategic partnerships.

"This policy has served Malaysia and ASEAN well through the most intense periods of big power rivalry in the past and will continue to remain relevant as a regional security framework," he said.

Dr Mahathir said notices were served accordingly to all nations, both far and near, to respect Malaysia's non-aligned posture and the nation's independence and sovereignty.

"Don't expect us to join you against your rivals and don't expect us to fight your wars. We will welcome all who come to help us build a stable, prosperous, open and interconnected region. We will spurn all who come to dominate or divide our region into warring camps," he said.

The prime minister said it was also a potent reminder to all that national unity is one of the foundations of national security.

In Yemen, local differences were allowed to fester into a civil war which in turn was exploited by outside power for their own ends, he said.

"While Malaysia is fortunate to have had a strong foundation of national unity, we must not take anything for granted. We must continue to work hard to overcome our racial and religious differences and build a strong and united nation that is respectful and tolerant of diversity and difference," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that was the promise that the Pakatan Harapan (PH) government made to the people and would do the best to make it happen.

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