

PM: Europe can look East for guidance

HONG KONG: Europe, still reeling from the effects of the financial crisis, should "look East" to emulate the success of the East Asian countries.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad gave this advice yesterday, saying there was a time when Asians looked to the West for guidance.

"Perhaps, it is time for Europe to look East for the same. This forum can perhaps serve that purpose," he said in his opening dinner address at the first Europe-East Asia Economic Forum here.

More than 380 senior government leaders and

business executives will meet for three days at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre to discuss economic and political issues facing Asia and the role of Europe in the region.

Elaborating on the success of the East Asian economies, Dr Mahathir said their achievements were due to the willingness to accept lower living standards when they could not afford a higher one.

"They should not be forced to have higher living standards to nullify their competitive edge," he said.

"Rather, it is the Europeans who must question the wisdom of their ways and come to terms with reality. Then Europe and East Asia can co-operate for mutual benefit."

Dr Mahathir said Europe was living beyond its means, where the people were being paid too much for too little work.

Europe, he said, could not really expect the rest of the world to support its profligacy.

While expecting high living standards and a healthier environment for its people, it was not willing to make sacrifices, he said.

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- "When it was suggested that Europeans accept a lower standard of living in order to sustain the environment, they reacted with horror. Yet they expect the poor nations not to exploit their own natural resources just because these were needed to sustain the environment of the North," he said.

"In other words, the poor must sacrifice for the rich. But the rich will not make any sacrifices."

He cited Japan as a fine example of a country which had turned its tremendous skills and energy into creating a world

where the poor could live almost as comfortably as the rich.

"It is the Japanese who succeeded in lowering the cost without sacrificing quality and so make available yesteryear's luxuries to more people."

In fact, Dr Mahathir said, without Japan and the Japanese success story, there would be no role model for the East Asian nations.

They would continue to believe that the Europeans could not be challenged in the fields they had pioneered and perfected.