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Mahathir-China

NO ONE SHOULD FEAR A WEALTHY AND STRONG CHINA, SAYS MAHATHIR

From Abdul Rahman Sulaiman

BEIJING, May 11 (Bernama) -- Countries of Southeast Asia should have no fear of a wealthy and strong China and they should instead welcome it, Datuk Seri ⁹⁴Dr. Mahathir Mohamad said today. *overseas frps*

The Prime Minister said the countries would tend to benefit in terms of their ability to share the wealth through trade and economic interaction with China.

He told an international business gathering of world's top corporate leaders here that the Chinese had now found an answer to their political and economic needs in what they termed the "Socialist Market Economy."

Dr. Mahathir, who flew here after a successful meeting with U.S. President Bill Clinton in Washington, dwelt at length on Malaysia's early experience in managing its economy and the obstacles it faced, democracy and China's current economic modernization efforts in his address on the theme "The Socialist Market Economy of the People's Republic of China: An Asean Perspective," at the 1994 China Summit Meeting. -- more

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He said although he was no expert on China, he had followed with a great deal of interest over the last 60 years of his life, as an individual, the great events occurring in and around China.

He said: "I have read substantially about China's last 2,000 years. But I'm by no stretch of the imagination an expert on China.

"I cannot imagine that I know more about Chinese policy than the Chinese leadership and its wealth of advisors."

Nevertheless, he intuitively understood what China was attempting to do, why it was doing it and how it was going about the entire process of revolutionising its society and building towards a place of pride and comprehensive prosperity for its people in the 21st century.

He believed his views were shared by other leaders in Asean and East Asia.

This was because almost all countries in East Asia were trying to do the same thing in the best way they knew how, given the complexities of their own specific situations, the enormous obstacles and the incredible opportunities before them. -- more

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Dr Mahathir said China was right in sticking to its brand of socialist politics while espousing a version of the market economy.

This was so because it had managed to avoid the kind of economic and political anarchy the Soviet Union suffered.

"It is right because it is apparently more successful economically. It is growing and growing very fast," he added.

He cautioned the Western powers against being too fearful of a prosperous China.

He said although a rich China would spend much more than what it was now spending on its military forces and, thus, becoming a true world power with the attendant economic and political clout, historically, Beijing had not exhibited any consistent policy of territorial acquisitiveness.

He added: "Its neighbours may have lost some disputed territory, but full invasion and colonisation has not been a feature of Chinese history.

"This differs very much of course from the European record."

He said the question of Chinese aggression occupied much of the western mind because, historically, hegemony and violent or peaceful occupation of territories had always been the West's approach to self-preservation and wealth. As a result, they naturally suspected China of having similar ambitions. -- more

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If Southeast Asia was not apprehensive of Japan, he saw no reason why it should be worried about China, he added.

Dr. Mahathir said the presence of a western power in the region would not make any difference, especially after Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda.

"It takes only one soldier to be killed before the whole force will be withdrawn," he said.

On the other hand, he said, a prosperous China would become the engine of growth, firstly, for East Asia, including Southeast Asia, and then the world.

Although it could be expected that China would export to the world, it would still have to buy a whole lot of things from the rest of the world, he added.

In this respect, Southeast Asian countries would have at their doorsteps a huge market for their edible oil, gas and petroleum products and even manufactured goods.

Dr. Mahathir admitted that spreading wealth evenly in a market economy was far more difficult than spreading poverty evenly through the command economy. -- more

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He said there would probably be more political problems, not least the demand for greater public participation in the political process.

The government would have to give in, fighting a rearguard action all the way, he added.

He said there might even be upheavals and bloodshed along the way.

However, he was confident that the Chinese were likely to handle it better than the Russians or the Yugoslavs.

Dr. Mahathir said East and Southeast Asians could reasonably expect this scenario in China as being more likely than that projected by European and American observers.

With China's modernisation and economic development, the wheel of progress would have turned full circle and Asia would, at the very least, regain its place in the world civilisation.

"Europeans may not like this but there is no reason for Asians to actively assist them in order to block China and delay Asia's rightful place in the sun," he said. -- more

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Mahathir-China 6 Beijing

Earlier, he reminded the West against imposing their systems and values on China.

He said no amount of intellectual brilliance and sincerity could overcome the iron law that, in order for policies and actions to work, they must always fit the specific conditions within which they have to operate.

As it surely must be the task of China's leaders and intelligensia to pick and choose from the methods of other countries which could possibly fit in with the conditions in China, the best thing that others could do was to be open about their own experiences, good and bad, if they wish the Chinese well, he added.

Dr. Mahathir said while the term "socialist" means different things to different people, he had no doubt that China's "Socialist Market Economy" rejected laissez faire capitalism -- the extreme type of market economy which regards the government as extraneous.

It was also rejected by seven other successful East Asian economies (with the possible exception of Hong Kong) dubbed as "the East Asian Miracle" -- Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. -- more

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Citing the case of Malaysia, he told the audience of 250 foreign businessmen, mostly CEOs and presidents and 140 Chinese CEOs, that a free-market economy alone could not guarantee success if various essentials, including a strong and stable government, were not in place.

"China needs the strong government that it has. It may be authoritarian but it is better than anarchy," he said.

He added: "Business needs order. It needs to have a predictable future, for few businesses are immediately profitable or successful. The bigger the business, the longer is the gestation, and the greater is the need for a predictable future.

"A firm, strong government can reasonably ensure a predictable future. A weak government, depending upon a fickle public, buffeted by the demands of the extremists of the right and the left, cannot be stable, much less ensure predictability."

He said as good governments could not be had for free, a price would have to be paid; before good governments could be conjured up, sacrifices would have to be made. -- more

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In view of this, for the 1.2 billion Chinese, individual freedom to go against the interest of the majority was a luxury it could ill-afford.

Although democracy was the greatest idea ever conceived by man, like all other ideas, it was not born perfect, he added.

"Who today would regard 10 per cent of the population having absolute right to rule a state as democratic?" he asked.

Yet, that was the democracy in the Greek city states which first conceived the democratic system, he said.

Dr. Mahathir said democracy today took various forms; interpretations and practices differed even among western liberal democrats.

"Some consider carrying guns as a fundamental right, others consider lying as an absolute right, others have various degrees of limitations on individual public behavior while others still hesitate at legally recognising homosexual marriages and families," he added.

"What they do agree is that anything they do or do not do is democratic and everybody else not in their circle is undemocratic," he said. -- more

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Dr Mahathir said the worst part was the assumption that democratic western countries could foist their principles through undemocratic means.

They objected to other ideologies being spread by subversion or force but they never hesitated to use the same methods of spreading their ideology, he added.

He listed sanctions, arm-twisting and sustained campaigns through their controlled media as weapons used by the west to impose their values on the developing countries.

Dr. Mahathir said countries in East Asia did believe in democracy and were anxious to practise it. But, they also believed in strong, stable governments that were not easily pressured. -- Bernama

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