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Mahathir-Pacific

PACIFIC ERA MUST SEE OPEN TRADE, SAYS DR M

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KUALA LUMPUR, May 23 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today identified "two pillars" for the building of a community of cooperative peace and mutual prosperity in the Pacific region.

The first is to ensure a Pacific market system which unleashes the ferocious force of enterprise and catalyses all the synergistic potential of the Pacific, he said.

"The second is to ensure the development of a Pacific economic system firmly wedded to open regionalism," he said in his keynote address at the opening of the 27th International General Meeting of the Pacific Basin Economic Council (PBEC), here.

He said the Pacific Era must be built upon the firm foundation of a liberalising Pacific economic system that is fast reducing the obstacles to the flow of goods and services.

"I believe that we owe it to the world and to ourselves to also proceed on the basis of lowering the obstacles to businesses located outside the Pacific rim," he added. -- more

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The prime minister told the more than 500 chief executive officers attending the three-day meeting that "however macho we are on the Pacific, we must never forget the global community".

"We of the Pacific must never forget our global frame of reference and our global frame of operations. The Pacific community which we should seek to build must not be inward-oriented and discriminatory towards the rest of the world," he said.

"We would be foolish if we of the Pacific get together in order to circle our wagons, to raise the barricades and to keep everyone else out.

"Our Pacific community must be open to the world, to the exports and the investments, technology and comprehensive economic penetration of the rest of the world," he said.

Dr Mahathir said they must escape the Euro-centric trap that has been a source of weakness in Western Europe. -- more

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The prime minister also said that they must be equally committed to open regionalism in all the various regional schemes which they embarked on, like the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) and the free trade area between Australia and New Zealand (ANZCERTA).

"The same must hold for whatever is tried in East Asia. Any East Asian scheme for economic cooperation, including the EAEC (East Asian Economic Caucus), which has been the victim of so much deliberate misinformation, must be wedded to this idea of open regionalism," he said.

Noting the diverse countries, cultures and people that made up the Pacific Community, Dr Mahathir said he also believed that the true Pacific Community that has to be patiently built must be robust, must be infused by friendship and a sense of community.

It must also be egalitarian and democratic, and be beneficial to all of the members of the Pacific family, he added.

"It must be a community that will endure, not a Pacific construct founded on a transient passion or a temporary association of convenience that might be here today and gone tomorrow," said Dr Mahathir. -- more

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He said his advocacy of egalitarianism and democracy was not an attempt to fly in the face of reality but then the Pacific Community could not be built on the basis of hegemony and imperial command.

The prime minister also noted that there are those who believed in the historical inevitability of the Pacific as the future economic centre of gravity of the world. But, he said, he believed that things are inevitable only if they make them so.

"Our Pacific Era will be stillborn if we quarrel and fight amongst ourselves, if we divide the Pacific, if we create discriminatory trading blocs, if we draw a line down the Pacific, if we are unwilling to extend to each other the normal rules and regulations -- like the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) -- that are the norms between trading economies."

Dr Mahathir also said that it is not the leaders, officials, bureaucrats, the intellectuals or the media that are the most important builders of the Pacific Community.

"Yet, right or wrong, it is simply my view that the most important sustained builders of the Pacific community that must be built in the days, weeks, years and decades ahead will be the workers, managers and entrepreneurs of the business communities of the countries of the Pacific rim." -- more

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He said that while the governments obviously have a major role to play, he did not believe that in the foreseeable future governments have all that great a role to play.

"The Almighty help us if we were to create the Pacific analogue of the Eurocrats who have played such an interventionist role in Europe," he said.

To try to build a Pacific Community along the lines of the European community, he said, would be extremely disruptive and damaging to the long-term building of a Pacific community. -- Bernama

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