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Mahathir-Asia (With Pix)

A NEW ASIA ON THE RISE, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 11 (bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today stressed the need for Asian countries to continue with the task of creating a New Asia, one that will bring massive and comprehensive development to the region.

Saying that a New Asia is on the rise, the Prime Minister said for Asia to be worthy and to have the capability, there has to be a conscious Asian Renaissance, a rebirth that would re-make Asia and re-shape the world.

"Asia cannot be stopped... This New Asia must continue to be an achieving Asia, a continent of progress, bringing massive and comprehensive development to all Asians," he said in his keynote address at the New Asia Forum here.

The two-day forum is jointly organised by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) and Transforma Conferences, a Hong Leong Group Malaysia affiliate.

More than 100 people from 10 countries including Malaysia, China, India, Japan and Taiwan are attending the forum.

Dr Mahathir said the New Asia must be a contributing Asia, a continent that contributes not only to its constituents' advancement but to the advancement of mankind as a whole.

To achieve that, the New Asia has to be an empowered Asia, "a continent that is a mover and shaker, not the object but the subject of international affairs and not a consequence but a cause."

He added that while Asia must eschew the idea of Asian dominance, it must still insist on being an equal partner of Europe and America and reject domination by any of them.

So far, the Asian nations have developed separately, disparately and with no vision of the roles they should play for Asia and the world, he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Renaissance of Asia has been going on unnoticed and the time has come for Asian countries to make themselves aware of it.

"We should come together, not to confront others, not to form a trade bloc, not to be obstreperous and arrogant... as much as we should not be apologetic, we should bear no grudges," he added.

Dr Mahathir said Asian countries must only assert their democratic rights as nations to be equal and not to allow themselves to be mentally, informationally and diplomatically bludgeoned.

"We must point out that it is undemocratic of others to stop us from forming a talking shop like the EAEC (East Asia Economic Caucus) when they themselves are forming protectionist trade blocs," he added.

He went on to cite examples of a few Asian countries like Japan, China, Taiwan and South Korea which managed to rise from the ashes of war and poverty to become economic giants.

Malaysia too, he said, once considered by the Western world as a prime candidate for the "dustbin of history," is now enjoying a standard of living higher than any country in the South, Central or North America with the exception only of the United States and Canada.

"...in Asia, we are only behind Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Not bad for a primary candidate for the dustbin of history... not bad for a country which so many 'knew' had no future," he added.

Dr Mahathir said if Asian nations were to believe that the next great economic crusade would be one for efficiency and productivity, not just for

human resource development or foreign investments, he suspects that Asia will somehow achieve it.

He cautioned, however, that the the Asian Renaissance would face opposition from "the tyranny of the Western controlled international news media."

"They have a vested interest to see that the Asian rebirth is aborted, partly because bad news make money for them and partly because the West to which they belong feel threatened," he said.

Saying that the rebirth of Asia was not going to be easy, he said it can be achieved if Asians "work at it and work hard." -- BERNAMA