

28 MAR 1996

Mahathir-Asia

ASIA POISED TO REVIVE PAST GREATNESS, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: Syed Jamil Jaafar

AUCKLAND, March 28 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Asia and Asians are set to achieve greatness as they did in the past and once again become world players.

He said they would secure their independence and go on to achieve greater economic strength and become imperial nations as in the past -- but economically and not territorially, this time

"Their voices will once again be heard and respected in world affairs," he said in a speech entitled "The Reality of A Resurgent Asia" at the opening of the New Zealand Asia Institute at the University of Auckland.

Dr Mahathir, who is on the final day of his four-day official visit to this South Pacific island nation, yesterday inaugurated the Chair of Malay Studies at Victoria University in Wellington.

He said Asians would not dominate the world but their place in the world order of things would be secured.

Historical evidence showed that the earliest civilisations were found in Asia, he added.

He said: "If Asia was a greater civilisation than Europe once was, can it not be as advanced as Europe now?"

"There is nothing inherently inferior in Asians as there is nothing inherently superior in Europeans."

Dr Mahathir recounted the past glories of Asians such as the great conquests of the Arabs, the Turks, the Persians and the Mongols.

He said: "... I believe that what people could do in the past, they can do again. I would hasten to add that I don't think Asian countries would be setting out to conquer the world once again, to build empires.

"I don't think China and Japan are about or should start wars of conquest to re-establish Asian capabilities and greatness."

Modern empires were economic, created through trade and economic relations, although quite often, there was political dominance as well while military occupation was unlikely, he added.

Asian countries now seek to build such "empires," exclusive if they can but usually shared with others, Asians and Europeans or Americans.

Dr Mahathir said the Asian countries had now found the formula for equality and a more benign imperialism, first achieving political stability and then focussing on economic development.

Some Asian countries would be economically more powerful than others but all would be prosperous and be able to throw away the begging bowl, the need for aid and the need to buy protection from outside powers.

For the first time all the Asian countries are independent and East Asia, including Southeast Asia, is free from war, he added.

"Peace sits comfortably on them and they are not idling. They are all working very hard to better themselves," he said. -- BERNAMA

SJ LDB