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Mahathir-Award

MAHATHIR GETS AWARD AT GLITTERING CEREMONY

By: Mahesh Prasad

NEW DELHI, Dec 20 (Bernama) -- Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was presented the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding at Rashtrapati Bhawan, the Indian President's residence-cum-office complex, here, tonight.

The award was conferred by Indian President Dr Shanker Dayal Sharma at a glittering ceremony in the Ashok Hall of the Rashtrapati Bhavan in the presence of a distinguished gathering of ministers, senior officials and diplomats.

Presenting the award, which carries a cash presentation of R.S. 1.5 million (US\$43,000), Dr Sharma said that under Dr Mahathir's stewardship "Malaysia has emerged in the front ranks of the `Asian Tigers' who represent the new dynamic spirit of this ancient continent."

Affirming that Dr Mahathir's vision was not limited to promotion of the well-being and prosperity of Malaysia, he said: "You have voiced the aspirations, the fears and concerns of the countries of the south. You have always stood for a democratic and international order, where the voice of the South is heard and respected."

Accepting the award as "a great honour and privilege", Dr Mahathir said that while colonialism had ended, "What we are experiencing now is indeed a new form of colonialism, more insidious than open colonialism."

He called upon developing countries "to unite and speak with one voice to secure our place in the global market."

U Thant, former U.N. Secretary-General, was the first recipient of the award in 1965. Other recipients of the award, instituted in the early sixties, were Martin Luther King, American civil rights leader Indira Gandhi (former Indian prime minister), Nelson Mandela, Julius Nyerere and Mother Theresa.

Describing Nehru as "an illustrious son of India", Dr Mahathir said: "His philosophy and ideas inspired and moulded the thinking of many leaders of the time."

Most of all, Nehru lived and fought for an end to colonialism, he said, adding: "Five decades have now passed. We are now free from the stranglehold of the old colonialism and we are free to shape our destiny. However, as we intensify our efforts to develop our economy and bring prosperity to our people, we are continuously hampered by new obstacles that restrict our march towards progress and economic development."

Dr Mahathir said: "New issues are constantly being introduced to keep us as dependent as we were when we were colonies. Thus the few competitive advantages that we have are being assailed while the major advantages that the developed countries have, such as patent rights, know-how, capital, huge domestic markets etc may not be touched at all."

Recalling Nehru's teaching of "cooperation among mankind and nations, Dr Mahathir exhorted developing countries to intensify cooperation among themselves, saying: "We should concentrate and build on our similarities and complementarities rather than highlight our differences and divisions."

Dr Mahathir said: "We should be more forthcoming in sharing our expertise and technological know-how rather than harp on our inadequacies. We should provide opportunities and facilities for the development and promotion of trade and investment so as to create a real bridge to effective and productive cooperation among us."

"Most of all, we must stand together to articulate our concerns and

exercise our rights to a fair and just trading environment. For only when we achieve economic strength can we be truly independent."

Welcoming Mahathir as a "symbol of vibrant Asia" Dr Sharma said: "We admire you as a leader who has stood throughout his life for the principles and values which were illuminated by Pandit Nehru and are cherished by the Indian people."

The president agreed with Dr Mahathir that "the age ideology is over and battlefields are being converted into market places".

He said: "The goal of a peaceful and prosperous world, where countries are not divided into antagonistic blocks of East and West, rich and poor, first and third world, is no longer a dream. It is realistic and is achievable." -- BERNAMA

MP JK