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Mahathir-UN

MAHATHIR WARNS AGAINST "GLOBALISATION" EFFORTS OF RICH NATIONS

By: Syed Jamil Jaafar

NEW YORK, Sept 27 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has warned that "globalisation" of the world that everyone seems to be talking about can mean nothing more than the world market belonging to the rich nations.

He said that if the current behaviour of the rich countries was anything to go by, globalisation simply meant the breaking down of the borders of countries so that those with the capital and the goods would be free to dominate the markets.

"Colonies in the former British Empire will remember 'imperial preference' when they were made the exclusive markets of the metropolitan power," the Prime Minister said in his address to the 51st United Nations General Assembly Friday.

"Globalisation can mean just that except that the world market will belong to the rich nations.

"Linkages to non-trade issues will prevent the poor from ever challenging the rich, in the same way colonies were not allowed to industrialise."

Apart from globalisation, Dr Mahathir dealt at length on freedom of the media in his 12-page speech. The Prime Minister was the third speaker in the morning session of the assembly whose president for the next one year is Malaysia's Permanent Representative Tan Sri Razali Ismail.

Dr Mahathir said elitism exercised by the major countries was frequently cloaked as "globalism" or as serving the common interests of nations.

However, even a cursory look at this brand of globalism revealed it to be sanctimonious if not hypocritical.

"For example, under the guise of safeguarding 'international peace and security' the nuclear weapon states maintained their right to destroy or threaten to destroy all life on this planet.

"Yet these countries deny others even the right to use conventional weapons for self-defence."

He said the Northern interpretation of 'free trade' and 'liberalisation' were slogans that in reality meant liberalisation when it benefited the North but protectionism if it could block the South.

"Thus while goods and capital are permitted and encouraged to move around the globe, labour and technology may not," he said.

In the context of the so-called globalised world, much was made of the terms 'inter-dependence' and 'mutual interests' while multilateralism was elbowed aside.

"Yet multilateralism is the foundation of international relations and cooperation which the United Nations symbolises. From now on, globalisation will take over and nations will lose their sovereignty."

"What are the universal values of this globalised world when increasing numbers of people in both the North and South live in abject poverty?" asked Dr Mahathir.

He pointed out that 1.3 billion people, one fifth of the human race, lacked access to the most basic necessities such as food and clean drinking water.

Preventable diseases killed 35,000 children throughout the world every day and the 1996 UN Human Development Report states that in the last 40 years, the richest 20 per cent of people have seen the differential between

themselves and the poorest 20 per cent double.

"Are we expected to believe in the sincerity of the rich countries when they talk about a 'new global partnership' and 'the achievement of sustainable development' when the facts are that today we have over 20 million environmental refugees in addition to an equal number of traditional refugees."

Dr Mahathir said the poor were no longer independent -- they had lost their own currency and now they were losing their borders too.

On the media, the Prime Minister said freedom of the press was touted as a basic democratic principle but control of the media by a handful of Western corporations had made nonsense of this principle.

Proclaiming to be 'windows on the world', the Western media, manipulated and censored by those in control, invariably managed to distort reports so as to put anything happening in the South in the worst possible light.

Anything positive in the developing countries was ignored.

He said that while the growth and influence of electronic, satellite and information technology was astounding, its impact posed one of the biggest political and ethical challenges of our time.

Dr Mahathir said monopoly of the electronic media by the North should be broken.

"As it is we are getting slanted news made worse by broadcasters interpreting in favour of their own or their countries' interests.

"As usual the poor countries with no role in operating the international media have become the principal victims of 'world news networks'.

"Not only are distorted pictures of our countries being broadcast but our own capacity to understand what is happening is being undermined.

"In the past Western missionaries spread the gospel. Today the media has taken over and all our cherished values and diverse cultures are being destroyed," Dr Mahathir said.

He said that although the information age would bring cheap and easy access to knowledge and education, and facilitate worldwide business, already its abuse was affecting the moral values of the world.

Smut and violence were no less polluting than carbon dioxide emissions nor less dangerous than drug trafficking.

The Prime Minister said before the world sank deeper into moral decay, the international community should act and stop abuse of the Internet system.

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