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Mahathir-Global

NEW ASIAN HEGEMONISM IS A MIRAGE, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: Wan A. Hulaimi

THE HAGUE, Dec 3 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has dismissed the notion of Asian hegemony in the next millennium as a "mirage wrapped in incredible arrogance".

The Prime Minister said many people, especially from Asia, believed that the next century would be the century of Asia, which will "inherit the future, will dominate the world".

This would not happen, nor should Asians aspire towards this new hegemonism, because the age of imperialism and hegemony had passed and their burial must be celebrated, he said in a keynote address at the Global Panel conference here today.

The conference, which this year focuses on Malaysia, is attended by political and business leaders.

Dr Mahathir, who arrived here yesterday with a delegation of officials and business leaders, will stay in Holland for a three-day visit before proceeding to Saudi Arabia on Dec 5.

His programme here will include a visit to the ailing Fokker aeroplane company, the solar energy centre and the road vehicles institute of the Netherlands Organisation of Applied Scientific Research, and the port of Rotterdam.

He will also hold talks with Dutch Prime Minister Wim Kok and have an audience with Queen Beatrix.

After giving his keynote address at the Global Panel today, he had a meeting with the Crown Prince of Jordan Prince Hassan Talal, who also addressed the conference, at the nearby Kurhaus hotel.

Dr Mahathir said a new century was now possible for the first time when no single nation, people or region would inherit the future which should be built on the basis of a commonwealth to bring prosperity for all.

Re-inventing a phrase by Adam Smith, whose book "The Wealth of Nations" was regarded as the foundation of modern economics, he said the key to the attainment of this goal was a mind-shift towards thinking in terms of the "invisible shoulder".

"Just as Adam Smith stressed one single factor, the 'invisible hand', in the process by which nations create wealth, let me stress one single mind-shift in prescribing the means by which the global commonwealth I speak of can be actively pursued. Let me call this the 'invisible shoulder'," he said.

Mankind, he said, had long been in the grips of a basically "beggar thy neighbour" mindset.

"Is this unrealistic idealism? If this is (so), come to our region to see how unrealistic we are. We persevere because we have seen the wonders worked by this invisible shoulder in East Asia.

"All have risen with the rising East Asian economic tide. And we, even the tiger cubs, are going abroad, to places which Western socialism had destroyed, to put our shoulders to the wheels and to achieve the same 'unrealistic' miracles."

He defined the quality to make possible the "rising tide of dynamism and prosperity" as reasonably enlightened self-interest coming from a rationality that is able to see slightly beyond the end of one's nose, from a little bit of courage and leadership in doing what they know they must.

He said that by speaking against the "Asian century" he did not mean that Asia was not rising or should not rise, but that this prosperity was

to be shared by all for the benefit of the world.

He said foreign investments were needed and only the blind and the foolish would not know that the process of learning from the West would be continuing.

Asia, he said, had witnessed a fundamental cultural shift and had rediscovered its self worth after centuries of Western dominance.

Describing this new spirit, he said: "For the first time in world history, there is a sense of regional consciousness rising in East Asia and a sense of Asian pride rising throughout most of Asia.

"There has been a fundamental change in capability and empowerment. There has also been a fundamental change in heart and mind."

He said many predictions made by experts on Asia had proven wrong, from the pessimism about the ability of the new emerging economies to continue at such sizzling speeds over such a long time without losing steam or collapsing from sheer exhaustion, to the dire prediction by "learned" Western journalists that Southeast Asian dominoes would fall one by one as soon as Vietnam fell.

"As recently as 1980, just 16 years ago, the total regional GDP (gross domestic product) of the East Asian regional economy amounted to less than two thirds of the regional GDP of Western Europe or of North America.

"By 1990, East Asia as a region was already three quarters the size of Western Europe and of North America. There now appears to be an overpowering consensus that by the year 2000, all three regional economies will be roughly the same size," he said.

There were many who now believed that by 2030, the regional economy of East Asia would be the size of Western Europe and Northern America put together, he added.

Dr Mahathir then gave further predictions from authoritative bodies about the exponential growth of the East Asian economies.

The IMF predicted that in the 1990s, US\$5.7 trillion would be added to the gross world product of goods and services, half would be produced by East Asia.

The European Union believed that half of the growth of world trade up to the year 2000 would be generated in East Asia, and that 300 million East Asians would by then have an average disposable income as high -- if not higher -- than their European or United States counterparts.

"Can it be any surprise that for sometime now Europe has been exporting dramatically more to East Asia than to the United States and the United States has been exporting dramatically more to East Asia than to Europe?"

"Is it any surprise if even Japan exports more to the rest of East Asia than it does to either Europe or the United States?"

"As a matter of interest, the US exports more to my small country of 20 million consumers than to the whole of eastern Europe and Russia. To the US, in terms of exports, we are roughly three times the size of Russia."

In place of the "Asian Century" which was not about to happen, Dr Mahathir said he saw a better, much more preferable, scenario in the economic realm.

This scenario included Europe's rediscovery of its enormous dynamism, America's economic relaunch based on its incredible enterprise and competitiveness, the rise of Asia "springing from its unbounded human resources, capacity for hard work and superhuman effort when motivated", and the development of the vast resources of Africa by the Africans and the whole world.

This new scenario for a better world also meant that they would drop what he called "the silly confrontations inherited from the Crusades".

"Stop associating Islam with terrorism for we all know that Christians, Jews and Buddhists have blown up more buildings and killed more people than

Muslims.

"Indeed, the methods and means of terror have all been invented in Europe and America. The crusade of the future must be the crusade to mend and to rebuild," he said. -- BERNAMA

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