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Mahathir-values

TIME TO REEXAMINE VALUES AND SYSTEMS OF GOVERNMENT, SAYS PM

By: K.C. Leong

BANGKOK, March 3 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he felt the time was now right for the whole world to reexamine its systems of government, value systems and morality.

This was because the world was seeing a collapse of values everywhere, something which was not doing any good to anyone, the prime minister told a regional forum for Asian business leaders here.

He made these comments at a one-hour question-and-answer dialogue with the mostly Asian audience who responded enthusiastically to his earlier address and his replies during the dialogue, epitomising the renewed confidence and a resurgence of the East Asian region which he had alluded to in his speech.

Dr Mahathir said he believed and hoped that over time, Asian views would be revalued by the West and where they were found to be equitable and fair, they would be accepted by them.

As for democracy, he stressed that it had its limits although he believed fully in it because through the ages democracy had proved to be the best form of government and the best system of running a country.

Dr Mahathir noted that the West previously had no religion and it was the East which provided it with Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

He added that these religions were fully accepted and Christianity was accepted in such a way "that it frightens us, if you remember the Inquisition where they used to be very intolerant of people who did not believe in their faith".

"But I believe that societies will be forever studying their own performance and where society finds its performance is wanting, it will try to devise new ideas, new values to correct the problems which are to be found in society," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the European society with its Judeo-Christian ethics had resulted in America doing extremely well until new ideologies emerged.

As to whether the failed ideologies of the West would be replaced by Asian values, he said: "We cannot achieve a really perfect society. We can approximate that, but there would be some aberrations and these should not be used to measure the performance of any community."

"As much as we would say that the Inquisition is an aberration and is not a reflection of Christian ethics, you can also say that the so-called Islamic fundamentalism is an aberration and is not the actual interpretation of Islam."

Dr Mahathir, known for his combative style and no-holds-barred approach, sent the audience erupting into laughter when he added: "I'm a Muslim and I don't go around bashing people - except with my mouth."

He said in time, he believed the West would learn to accommodate Asian values and Asians would learn to accept good Western values.

On the limits of democracy, Dr Mahathir said over time, interpretations of democracy had changed and there was now a tendency towards greater freedom to the point where there was no longer democracy, merely anarchy. "It may be democratic but it is also anarchy."

"Like all things, there is no such thing as absolute democracy. I feel that governments must have legitimacy through the support of the people and that support must come via the ballot box," he said

He said elections must be free but freedom did not mean being able to bash or shoot opponents and people who vote must understand the meaning of

democracy.

He said there were some people who felt that minorities must have rights but he stressed that such rights must not deprive the majority of their rights although often the position taken was that it was the right of the minority to do whatever they like irrespective of the deprivation of the right of the majority.

"We agree that the majority should not oppress the minority but then the minority should not oppress the majority either. And these are things that need to be understood before democracy can work," he added.

Asked whether Asia's rising affluence could undermine the strength of adherence to its values, causing it to go the same way as the West, he said there was obviously such a danger as family ties broke down, people migrated to urban areas, felt more free and no longer restrained and their value system changed.

"This is something we need to pay attention to, which is why in Malaysia, when we say that under Vision 2020 we want to achieve a developed country status, it is not only with emphasis on material affluence, but we also want to maintain our moral values and this has to be done quite deliberately." -- BERNAMA

LKC YBY