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Mahathir-China

WEST FEARS CHINA'S ECONOMIC, NOT MILITARY POWER, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: K.C. Leong

BANGKOK, March 3 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that what the West now feared was not a militarist China but a resurgent, economically powerful China, a large market which could dictate to those countries wanting to sell their goods to it.

"This is the worry in the West," the prime minister said when asked for his vision of China's role in world affairs at a forum for Asian business leaders here.

He said that as an optimist, he did not think that China would go to war in the same way that countries went to war before.

"War as a means of resolving international problems is out of date. There is too much damage done by war and most countries have now learned that in order to dominate, they have to be economically powerful.

"By being economically powerful you can, in fact, influence events throughout the world," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he did not think China would spoil the power that it had been able to achieve so far by, for example, forcing a reoccupation of Taiwan as Japan did through its military adventurism in the past. "They have got Hong Kong without shooting a single bullet."

"I think that there will be some solution to the present impasse over Taiwan and it will not be a military solution.

"I see China as a powerful economic force in the world. Whether we like it or not, 1.2 billion people, even with a low per capita income, is a big and attractive market to the whole world," he said.

Asked about Taiwan's role in world affairs, Dr Mahathir said he felt that Taiwan had a role to play, not as an independent country but as a unit.

He cited the example of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum where Taiwan was represented, not as a country but as a special entity.

"But if Taiwan wants to insist that it be treated as a country with diplomatic recognition and be independent, I think that might create problems," he said.

To a question regarding the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asian countries, he said it could not be denied that they had contributed very much to the performance of the countries concerned.

In most instances, they had integrated well into the societies of the countries and in some cases were indistinguishable from other people in those countries, he said.

In the case of Malaysia, he said the Chinese identified closely with the country even though they were allowed to maintain their own schools, culture, associations, and even names.

Dr Mahathir said there was also another contribution which the overseas Chinese, with their well known business acumen, could make. They could serve as equally good "business gurus" as those from the West. -- BERNAMA

LKC YBY