

06/05/1997

Act to outsmart the rich, PM calls (HL)

Jailani Harun in Kasane (Botswana)

KASANE (Botswana), Mon: Seeing globalisation as "a new approach by developed countries to colonise the poor", Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has urged the South to form a smart partnership to respond to this new challenge.

The Prime Minister said by exchanging experiences in economic management, the developing countries could learn to do what is right and avoid making mistakes.

"The only way that the weak can face any challenge is to present a united front, better still to form a smart partnership," he said.

Dr Mahathir said in Malaysia, Smart Partnership in the form of the Malaysia Inc policy brings together the civil service, the private sector and the political leaders to produce results shared without exception by everyone.

Such results, he said, are crucial for any nation to avoid unnecessary complications arising from economic failure such as industrial strikes and from political instability.

"In an economically poor country, striking and taking to the streets cannot increase your income simply because there is really no wealth to distribute or redistribute," he said.

Addressing the First Southern Africa International Dialogue (SAID) here, Dr Mahathir said while direct occupation and political control have ended, they have been replaced by much more insidious forms of colonialism.

"Indeed, many of us have found that we are more dependent than when we were colonies. Our politics, economy, social and behavioural systems are all still under the control, directly or indirectly, of the old colonial masters and the great powers.

"And this constitutes the environment in which we have to manage ourselves. Our struggle for independence is far from over," he said.

"Colonisation is over, but now comes globalisation. The borders which define countries will be erased and economic competition on a so-called level playing field must reign supreme.

"Globalisation and level playing fields have become the catchwords of a new religion and as we know, you do not challenge religious faith no matter how obviously wrong they are. You merely accept it.

"Is it coincidental that globalisation seems to favour the rich and the powerful?"

The Prime Minister cited the case of the Malaysian car having to compete with those produced by the millions in the US, Germany and Japan.

"And yet we are told to open up the market. Our GSP (Generalised System of Preferences) is about to be withdrawn. And all these on the altar of globalisation, transparency, borderlessness, fair wages and level playing fields," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said open and free competition is great but every time Malaysia opens and freely competes, it loses out.

"How is that? Should the South confine itself to the real playing field - to soccer and cricket fields - where we stand a chance of winning and leave the economic playing fields to our betters?"

"I think we should, but now our best players will be bought by the rich so they may get all the gold for themselves on the real playing fields too.

"I am not saying this out of bitterness. Malaysia has done reasonably

well. Asean has done reasonably well. But what I have mentioned are facts, hard facts, which will have a bearing on the future of all developing countries," said Dr Mahathir.

The World Trade Organisation is being used by the North for their own economic interest. There are also efforts by the North to halt the economic development of the South, he said.

The European Union is a giant economic entity capable of forcing its will on the South. The Group of Seven (G-7) was formed to totally dominate the world, and colonise it by other means.

As an example, when Japan flooded the international market with their cheap yet high quality goods, the rest of the G-7 pushed up the value of the yen in order to make the Japanese less competitive and to regain their markets. This put Japanese goods out of reach of the poor.

Calling the G-7 "snooty", Dr Mahathir said they refused to listen to the developing countries, and refuse to talk to the chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement and to the Group of Fifteen developing countries.

"We live in an international jungle. There is no law and order in international relations. There is very little justice. The high and the mighty rule. The weak and the poor just have to lump it.

"With all these threats and obstructive actions we must now face the challenge of globalisation. Are we in a state to face this challenge? Quite obviously not, but no one is going to wait for us to get ready for the challenge," he said.

For this reason, he said, the developing countries should come together in the form of a smart partnership to confront the North.

"This is how we will ultimately challenge globalisation. I hope we don't have to resort to this. But we will if we are not allowed a piece of the action, a piece of the cake; if we are not allowed to prosper in a borderless world," he said.

SAID is attended by the heads of government from 12 countries, with Dr Mahathir being the special guest. The conference was mooted after the Langkawi International Dialogue last July.

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