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Dr M: Asia can help create a more equitable world

Azmi M. Anshar in Tokyo

ADDRESSING lecturers and students of Japan's prestigious Waseda University, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Japan should play its rightful role in world affairs and take up issues of concern to Asian countries.

The Prime Minister said Japan should cease to consider itself a western developed nation in the East.

He said: "Japan has the credibility to lead, not towards Asian domination in an Asian century but towards a more equitable world community in the century of the world which is dawning upon us.

"The role of Japan is obvious. It is by far the most advanced nation in Asia. It is well placed to lead as the first among equals. It should play its rightful role in world affairs."

The Prime Minister said this in his speech titled "The Future of Asia and the Role of Japan: Challenges of the 21st Century to Youths." Waseda University teaches the creme de la creme of children of a prosperous post-war Japan.

Qualifying his description that the students were special, Dr Mahathir said: "You are going to be an important element in the bridge and the link between this century and the next ... You are Japan's hope and aspiration for the coming millenium."

Dr Mahathir devoted a substantial portion of his speech articulating on his perspective of post-war Japan, its rise from destruction of the war and its role in the future.

Dr Mahathir disagreed with the belief among certain quarters that the 21st Century would be an Asian century. The Prime Minister said:

"There cannot be an Asian century. Asia cannot dominate the world, but a more cohesive Asia can provide the balance which will contribute towards the creation of a more equitable world."

Dr Mahathir said the co-operation among all countries of East Asia, including China, not in military or even economic terms, but in promoting justice and equitability, would create the kind of understanding which would diminish the possibility of conflicts and confrontations in East Asia.

Dismissing the European concept of domination and hegemony in the old sense as "out-dated and silly", he said it was unfortunate that Europeans still clung to the idea by postulating all kinds of possible hegemonic threats to Asia.

"Having lost their globe-girdling colonies, the Europeans now want to continue their dominance through dictating trade terms, Government systems and whole value system, including human rights and environmental protection," he said.

"No one seems capable or willing to counter them. Asians, the only people capable of balancing European influence, are divided and unwilling to play a meaningful role in world affairs."

While Asians and Europeans share the same guilt of previous cruel wars, he said there was a slight difference between the two - Europeans colonised and dominated the people they conquered but Asians tend to be assimilated by their subject people.

Urging Asians to drop their passivity, fragmentation and timid defence, he said Asians in the next century would be no different than they are now.

"If this was the case," he said, "then Asians deserve to be dominated by Europeans in an inequitable and unjust world."

As advice to youths, Dr Mahathir set out the following challenges to face in the 21st Century:

- * throw away the baggage of history;
- * forget colour and creed and notions of superiority or inferiority;
- * do not allow the Western wish for a clash of civilisations to occur;
- * think equality not in terms of material wealth alone but in being all members of the same human race; and
- * reorientate themselves to a world which has not only shrunk but will no longer be divided by East and West.

"We all belong to the same world, fed by the same information and accepting ever more uniform values and culture," Dr Mahathir said. "For Asian youths, their understanding of the shape and dynamics of the 21st Century will determine the role they will play and the Asia that will emerge."

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