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Mahathir-Dialogue

DIGITAL AGE BRINGS TREMENDOUS OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

By: Syed Jamil Jaafar

FUKUOKA, March 28 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the digital age has created conditions for the first time in history for countries and companies to mutually enrich one another.

"It is no longer a zero sum game with winners and losers," he said.

Addressing an international forum here, Dr Mahathir said as the 21st century neared, fantastic changes were taking place which made what was impossible in the old economy suddenly possible in the information age.

Borders between countries had disappeared because knowledge, capital, company activities and consumer preferences ignored lines drawn on a map, he said in his keynote speech on the theme "The Digital Century: Opportunities For Mutual Collaboration Between Malaysia And Japan."

The forum, dubbed the Fukuoka Dialogue, is organised by Malaysia's Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (Asli) and the Asia Business Centre and the Nishi Nippon Newspaper Co Ltd, both of Fukuoka.

Top Japanese and Malaysian corporate leaders and government officials are attending the meeting. The Malaysians include International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid, Pulau Pinang Chief Minister Tan Sri Koh Tsu Koon and Multi Media Development Corporation (MDC) chairman Tan Sri Dr Othman Yeop Abdullah.

Dr Mahathir said where countries once competed, with one nation's trade surplus resulting in another's trade deficit, in future both countries could benefit because networks of companies collaborated across borders to deliver value to customers in the most economically sensible way.

"There is a tremendous opportunity for those companies and countries with the courage to embrace these changes," he said.

"For a limited time, there is a relatively level playing field where developed and developing countries can work together in ways that create benefits for both."

He said this was because many of the wealthier developed countries were locked into obsolete industrial structures and legislative frameworks.

Vested interests in these systems would stubbornly resist change but this was not so in developing countries like Malaysia where such corporate interests had not yet developed.

Dr Mahathir said with the development of multimedia, there were almost unlimited opportunities for new industries to be developed and expanded throughout the world with hardly any need for direct face to face interaction of personnel.

The Prime Minister said the digital economy stressed the importance of networking of personnel worldwide or collaboration of human efforts in exploring new and powerful ways to achieve common enrichment through the use of information technology.

He said this was one area in which Japan and Malaysia could reap mutual benefit.

"Malaysia has manpower skills in certain areas which are relatively cheap and can be accessed by Japanese companies even if not located in Malaysia while Japan of course has multimedia technology which can play a role in a borderless economic world," Dr Mahathir said.

He invited Japanese companies to set up research and development (R & D) centres in Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) which is envisaged to become a global community living at the leading edge of the information

society.

The MSC, he said, would set the stage for Malaysians to enter the digital century.

Dr Mahathir said Japan and Malaysia should cooperate to create the electronic communities that would actively produce the indigenous content suitable to their needs.

The MSC, he said, would provide the perfect opportunity for this to take place.

"In the face of the information onslaught, we should adopt a proactive approach towards counter-balancing the western dominance of the cyberspace," he said.

"We are not saying that western influence is all bad. What we are emphasising is that by being digital, being IT literate and being technology advanced does not mean that our Asian values are not relevant.

"If anything, they will be even more relevant for our men and women as they search for their own niche and identities in a borderless environment," he said.

Dr Mahathir cautioned that with all the dazzling effects of information technology, it must not be forgotten that artificial intelligence can never replace the human intellect.

People, particularly managers of corporations, must lead business and society with a social responsibility that displayed not only a balanced set of values of humanity and ethics into their organisations but one that would inculcate the spirit of corporate integrity, he said. -- BERNAMA

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