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Mahathir-Century

DR MAHATHIR PROCLAIMS 21ST CENTURY AS "CENTURY OF THE WORLD"

By: Azman Ujang

LONDON, May 20 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has proclaimed the 21st century as the "Century of the World" with possibly unprecedented worldwide peace and shared prosperity, thanks to the emergence of the Information Age.

His vision is that of the World Century where the forces that drive the Information Age will result in the breaking down of physical, social and economic barriers which can stimulate growth through the process of "mutual enrichment".

Mutual enrichment is possible through shared creation of value by means of "webs" of alliances between companies where the best companies will no longer be able to perform all their economic activities within their corporate borders, he said in setting the tone for his European "road-show" to promote Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) here.

London is the third stop in what the Prime Minister described as his odyssey to drum up interest and support for the MSC, the 15 km wide by 50 km long hub for multinational corporations to direct their worldwide manufacturing and trading activities using multimedia. Similar road-shows were held in the United States and Japan earlier this year.

It stretches from the world's tallest buildings, the Petronas Twin Towers or also known as the Kuala Lumpur City Centre to Putrajaya, the new Federal government administrative capital replacing Kuala Lumpur.

In a keynote address before a packed audience of over 1,000 chief executive officers and other senior executives of information technology companies from several European countries at the Imperial College here, Dr Mahathir likened companies that would prosper in the new century to spiders.

"Like spiders, they would weave ever more intricate webs of relations with other companies so that each performs the activity it does best," he said, adding that the world has truly entered a new era without borders where the production of goods and services can truly be global.

In a knowledge economy, creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship are scarce resources and cannot be confined to borders but require the free movement of peoples and ideas for mutual enrichment.

He also wants to see every country and all the world's people to have access to all the competitive advantages of every kind everywhere.

Dr Mahathir's address entitled "A Global Bridge From Europe to Asia For the World Century" paints an overview of what is in store for an Information Age society in which Asia has a special role to play in creating the World Century.

Asia, especially the seven member countries of the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean), has been promoting the "prosper-thy-neighbour" policy to put an end to the "beggar-thy-neighbour" mindset which for too long has gripped nations.

It is this attitude that has made Asean countries -- Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam -- the world's fastest growing regional organisation.

He said Europe has been taking down barriers between states for a long time now not because the Information Age has come to the region earlier but simply because countries there have been fighting destructive wars against each other so frequently.

The Prime Minister told the European captains of industry that although

they have some experience in the borderless world with the European Union, they still need to know how it will function in the Information Age.

It is for this that Malaysia offers the MSC as a huge test-bed for trying out not just technology but also a way of life in the age of instant and unlimited information.

Dr Mahathir said it was true that some other countries have projects like the MSC, all of which are important and quite unique.

"But I would like to claim that the MSC is the most comprehensive test-bed devised for the purpose of learning and testing the technologies and their application in the Information Age," he said.

He also promised that the Malaysian government, which has always been business-friendly, is going to be more friendly to those who participate in the MSC.

For example, knowledge workers will be treated like special guests by being able to get in and out of the MSC without hassle and with multiple visa thrown in as part of a 10-point incentive package called the Multimedia Bill of Guarantees.

Others include freedom of ownership of companies, including 100 per cent ownership, globally competitive telecommunication tariffs and a high-powered one-stop implementation agency.

Dr Mahathir said so far the MSC has stirred up worldwide interest with some 1,000 serious inquiries, out of which 30 major players have so far committed themselves to setting up projects.

These companies are already involved in the structuring of the MSC, including Microsoft, Sun Microsystems, Netscape, EDS and IBM.

He also said that a new field of study will be required to deal with the psychological changes which the Information Age can bring about, and this in itself means further opportunities to make use of the MSC.

"The Information Age should result in a greater world civilisation than any civilisation we have known in the past.

"Remember, we are not developing the MSC just for ourselves. It is our contribution to the World Century of the Information Age," he said. --

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