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Let's work together for a better life: PM

Kamarul Yunus in Manama (Bahrain)

MANAMA (Bahrain), Tues: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has urged countries in West Asia to work with their Asian neighbours for a better life in the next millennium.

The Prime Minister, who is on a two-day official visit here, said this is possible but the right approach is important.

"Future endeavours can succeed if they are built on humility, not arrogance; on hard work, not complacency; and on a shared prosperity basis, not on the principle of zero sum game where the winner takes all," he said in a keynote address at the Fifth Gulf Economic Forum, an annual conference, today.

Dr Mahathir cited the Malaysian experience and what he referred to as the "Sinatra principle" - accomplishments through own ways - that Malaysia adopts.

He was apparently referring to Frank Sinatra's hit "My Way", a song many Malaysians assumed - incorrrectly, Dr Mahathir insisted recently - as his favourite.

He said: "We all did it our way but more than that, we all did it in the old fashioned way, without mystery of magic, but with a great deal of toil, tears and sweat."

Malaysia's success would not have been possible if Malaysians did not work hard, he stressed. In 1994, he noted, the average Malaysian worked 2,288 hours. In contrast, the Israelis worked 1,940 hours, the hardworking Swiss 1,879 hours and the Germans 1,704 hours.

"Malaysians even work harder than the Japanese. Only Chileans and South Koreans work longer hours," he added.

Dr Mahathir has as the theme of the address, "Building the Global Commonwealth of the 21st Century", where he extolled the virtues of the prosper thy neighbour policy.

He said the 21st century will obviously be "every bit as challenging as the murderous 20th century", when 160 million people have so far died from wars, while three billion - more than half of humankind - exist on merely US\$2 a day despite all the advances in the fields of science, communication, food production and all the possibilities for a world without poverty, living in peace, stability and justice.

"Cynicism is natural. Realism is absolutely essential. But I do believe a new world is ready to be built. If we can cherish the vision for a better world, for a truly new world order; if we can find the will, if we can summon the strength, if we can persist with the tenacity, the 21st century could be mankind's greatest century. There truly is a chance for a new beginning in the new millennium," he added.

Dr Mahathir then asked the West Asian countries not to neglect the South, saying that Asean and other countries of East Asia need the help of West Asia to shape a single world order of peace and prosperity.

He said West Asian countries should take account of the growth potential of countries in East Asia which is increasingly being recognised as the planet's centre of economic gravity.

This, the Prime Minister said, has led the West to label some East Asian countries as dragons and tigers, dubbing their success as the "East Asian Miracle".

Detractors of the East Asian Miracle, whom the Prime Minister referred to as "Asiasceptics," however, have been predicting that the sizzling

growth rates of the new economies would fall, and that the growth run would come to an end.

Countering this view, Dr Mahathir said the predictions of the "great thinkers" of the West sound too much like wishful thinking. The fear is that "if it does not happen (like they predict), these prophets of doom might try to make it happen."

While expressing his confidence that Asia could rise even more if it holds firmly to the secrets of the past and adjust rapidly to the demands of the future, the Prime Minister said: "Except for those with limited ambitions, the future will always present much difficulty. When we stop worrying about the future, that is the time to start worrying... Insyallah, we will continue to persevere."

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