

23/10/1997

PM urges global drive to make 21st century poverty-free

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LONDON, Wed: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called on all countries to commit to the global aim of making the 21st century poverty-free.

"We now have the means to absolutely eradicate absolute poverty," he said, adding that according to the UN Development Programme (UNDP), Malaysia has been the best "poverty killer" in post-war history.

"If we (Malaysia) can do it, the whole world can do it," he said, urging the international community to help make the new millennium the first century where mankind thrusts off the yoke of poverty.

In his keynote address at the United World College of the Atlantic here yesterday, Dr Mahathir argues for a "single global commonwealth" for the 21st century, one that must be characterised by mutual respect and appreciation and much greater consideration for the interests, feelings, values and ways of others.

The single global commonwealth excludes no one and includes all humanity, he said.

"The next century must be a new world characterised by liberte, egalite, fraternite at home as well as within the comity of nations.

"It must be a new world populated by flourishing, responsible, productive and sustainable democracies distinguished by remarkable standards of human rights and human responsibilities," he added.

His address was read by Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak. Dr Mahathir could not be present as he was recovering from a bout of influenza, but he will be in Edinburgh later this week for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

The Prime Minister said the new global commonwealth of the next century must be one that is not only based on mutual respect but also on a world civilisation propelled by a sincere celebration of civilisations; and because it has taken the best from what each has to offer, it will be a world civilisation enriched by the feast of civilisations.

"True peace is the most essential prerequisite for human progress, the cornerstone of the global commonwealth of the 21st century which we must build.

"But common and cooperative prosperity is also vital and what I believe is the key to this co-prosperity is a mind shift to the prosper-thy-neighbour doctrine," he added.

Quoting from Adam Smith's "The Wealth of Nations", Dr Mahathir said one single force will work incredible magic to produce the common good within an economy.

"Helping others to prosper is the rational thing to do, in terms of one's own interest. If you help your neighbour to prosper, you will prosper along with him. You should be laughing all the way to the bank if he is laughing all the way to the bank," he added.

Recalling the time when countries in East Asia were at each other's throats to beggar and impoverish their neighbours, Dr Mahathir said it took many centuries to discover a new way, to bury the "beggar-thy-neighbour" mindset and put in its place a "prosper-thy-neighbour" one.

"This is one reason why there is more than one Dragon in East Asia and more than one Tiger... why the entire region is populated by Dragons, Tigers and Tiger Cubs," he said, adding that one could well imagine the benefits Europe will derive from a vibrant, dynamic and prosperous

Americas, Africa and Asia - from a vibrant, dynamic and prosperous global commonwealth.

However, Dr Mahathir said he believes that the so-called Asian century will not come and advised Asians to shed this aspiration and prevent a new hegemonism from developing.

"The age of imperialism is dead. The time for hegemony has passed. They must be buried. And their burial should be celebrated.

"There must be no resurrection of imperialism, no touting of hegemonism, no glorification of dominance or domination in the 21st century. These things are immoral," he said.

From today's perspective, with the benefit of 20:20 hindsight, one will know that the great optimism of a hundred years ago was unjustified, the Prime Minister said.

"The 20th century should have been the century of peace, dedicated to the rejoicing of life. Instead, it has been the century of mega-death. It should have been a century of prosperity, common and cooperative prosperity, but instead it has been the century of mega-misery.

"The 20th century should also have been the century of civilisation and of the celebration of civilisations but... at its end, so many, especially in the North Atlantic cultural core, still cannot accept a culturally plural world," he added.

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