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Region can benefit from economically strong China

A. Kadir Jasin in Okayama, Japan

MALAYSIA sees China emerging as a strong economic power no matter what some countries do in trying to block its progress, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

"We in Malaysia think that we should not block China's progress," he said at a dialogue with government and business leaders of Japan's Okayama Prefecture.

Dr Mahathir was asked about Malaysia's position with regard to the emergence of China as a regional economic and military power.

"If we block China in its effort to improve its economy, it may act in an unrestrained manner when it becomes strong," Dr Mahathir said.

He said it would be better for the world to accept the fact that China would become powerful and to co-operate with it.

Dr Mahathir warned that treating China as a potential enemy in future would only seek to make China an enemy now.

He said Malaysia had accepted the fact that China would become powerful and that co-operating with it would be mutually beneficial. He pointed out that despite having a huge population and massive land area, China lacked many products and resources.

Dr Mahathir said trying to contain China militarily was not a wise policy.

Responding to a question on the Look East policy, Dr Mahathir said by looking east to Japan and other successful economies in the East, Malaysia had not given up looking West and elsewhere.

Reiterating that Malaysia would carry on with the Look East policy, he called for renewed effort to broaden its application.

He said there should be greater collaboration and exchanges at the Government, business and people-to-people levels.

Commenting on a point raised by the Japanese side that there were now over 1,000 Japanese companies and 10,000 Japanese nationals located in Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said while the figures were encouraging, more could have been done.

Citing the case of tourism, he said that while over one million Japanese tourists visited a Malaysian neighbour annually, only 250,000 came to Malaysia. He said by improving the flow of tourists to Malaysia, the people-to-people relations could be improved.

Dr Mahathir said while a small country like New Zealand had more than 7,000 students, only 2,000 Malaysian students were studying in Japan.

Dr Mahathir was also asked questions regarding leadership and his success as a national and an international leader.

He said a leader should be given the opportunity to stay in power long enough to enable him to put his ideas and programmes into practice.

He admitted that he himself was not very successful in the early years of his administration.

But over time, he had been able to fine-tune his policies and programmes to the point that most of them now worked effectively.

Despite still being on leave, Dr Mahathir and his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, are having a hectic schedule in Okayama and the surrounding area.

The Prime Minister's itinerary included pharmaceutical companies, Japanese kitchens, gardens and tourist attractions. He was looking for ideas that could be implemented in Malaysia.

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