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Mahathir-Century

THE "ASIAN CENTURY" WON'T HAPPEN, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: Wan A Hulaimi

LONDON, Oct 22 (Bernama) -- The "Asian century", which many in Asia expect the next century to be, will not happen, according to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in a speech delivered here.

Rather, the 21st century should be "the century of the world" or a single Global Commonwealth which excludes no one, he said in his speech read out by Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak at the United World College of the Atlantic here Tuesday.

He said Asians should not aspire to achieve an Asian century or to allow a new hegemonism even if they believed that the next century, only 26 months away, should be their century on the basis that it was Asia's turn to be lord and master.

Dr Mahathir was to have personally delivered his speech entitled "Asia's Place and Asia's Role in the Making of the Global Commonwealth of the 21st Century", but but could not make it as he is down with flu.

The prime minister said: "To those who think that it is moral and right that an Asian century will come to pass, I am sorry to burst their bubble. I believe that the idea of the Asian century walks down the well-trodden path of darkness".

Describing the much-touted Asian century as a "mirage", he said the era of Asian dominance over planet earth would not dawn and added that the age of imperialism was dead and the time for hegemony had passed.

"They must be buried. And their burial should be celebrated. Imperialism is no less evil if it is Asian imperialism. Hegemonism is no more tolerable if it is Asian hegemonism. Domination is no less a blight if it is Asian domination.

"What we in Asia must work for in the 21st century is not the century of Asia but the century of the world, a single Global Commonwealth which excludes no one, which includes all of humanity," Dr Mahathir said.

He advocated that the 21st century be a world populated by flourishing, responsible, productive and sustainable democracies distinguished by remarkable standards of human rights and remarkable standards of human responsibilities.

It must also be a new world characterised by mutual respect, mutual appreciation, much greater consideration for the interest, feelings, values and ways of others, he said.

The United World College of Atlantic, a private college, organises the annual lecture series for the captains of the British industry.

Dr Mahathir said Asians' belief of the next century being theirs was based on history where the 19th century was dominated by Europe and the 20th century by the United States.

On the outgoing 20th century, he said: "Is it not a shame that the immense promise of the 20th century, so palpably felt a hundred years ago, was so frustrated and perverted?"

He argued that the 20th century should have been the century of peace. dedicated to the rejoicing of life but instead it had been the century of megadeath.

"In the 20th century, we could have done so much to abolish absolute poverty absolutely -- to wipe it off the face of the earth. Yet what do we find?. Megamiserery such as the world has never seen".

Dr Mahathir said he was not condemning the few thousand billionaires who collectively had more wealth than a few thousand million human beings,

many of whom to this day were starving to death or on the edge of starvation.

He said it was "politically correct" to admire people who had massive fortunes at their command while there were those who said that the starving millions were best left forgotten or relegated to the footnotes of history.

"But I must confess that I am more than a little discomfited -- I feel deeply and personally upset -- when I think of the three billion inhabitants of this planet who have to survive on US\$2 a day, each and everyday of their lives".

In this century, he said, eight-and-a-half million soldiers and 13 million men, children and older men perished in the First World War and 19 million soldiers and civilians died in the Second World War.

Added to these were deaths due to doctrines, with Hitler and Nazism causing the liquidation of 17 million people, while Stalin and Russian communists put to the death between 20 and 25 million human beings.

Man's inhumanity to man had never before reached such heights with, so far this century, between 175 million and 200 million people having been killed in mass carnage of one kind or another, he said.

Dr Mahathir said the world actually had the means to eradicate absolute poverty and he cited Malaysia as an example.

Quoting United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) statistics, he said less than 30 years ago, more than half of all Malaysians lived below the line of absolute poverty.

But now Malaysians could look forward to entering the new century with zero absolute poverty, practically no one below the line of absolute poverty.

"The UNDP says that my modest country, Malaysia, has been the best poverty killer on the surface of this planet in the post-War human history. If we can do it, the whole world can do it.

"Let me ask the most simple of questions: Why not commit ourselves to poverty's end? Why not make the 21st century the first century of mankind freed from the enslavement of poverty?," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the next century ought to be one where man would be more caring not only of his fellow man but also of the physical environment "which must not suffocate or burn".

He added: "Those who believe that care for the environment is a luxury which we cannot afford are wrong. In reality, not caring for the environment is a luxury which we cannot afford. If we cannot launch this necessary global crusade to save the global environment at the dawn of the 21st century, the twilight of the 21st century will be dark. It will literally be pitch black."

On Asian values, Dr Mahathir said he would not defend those in power in Asia who were using the Asian value argument to justify the terrible things they were doing to their people.

"I will concede that many Asian values are horrible and have to be killed. Indeed, I have personally spent a large part of my life trying to do what I can to kill many of the Asian values which do us so much harm."

While admitting that there was still a very great deal that Asians must learn from the West, Dr Mahathir also pointed out that many Asian values of today were under attack and might disappear at some future date.

He also said that there were no grounds for idealism built on illusion if his idea of the Global Commonwealth of the 21st century was to be achieved.

"I most sincerely believe that my idealism is not built on illusion. All that I have advocated can be accomplished.

"But to accomplish it, we need a new Asia, finding its proper place in the making of global history and displaying the sort of role it once played

in the making of human civilisation," he said.

-- BERNAMA

WAH AU JK