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Emphasise skills and technology, PM urges Africans

Hardev Kaur in Tokyo

THE Asian approach and the Asian way towards development "is still a good strategy". If African countries are going to develop the way East Asian countries develop, then the strategy should be the same - concentrate less on aid but more on skills and technology.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Asians should share their experience with others so that all can enjoy growth and development. "Our experience is quite recent and it is still fresh in our minds. We should be able to pass it on with great ease."

He said countries in Latin America have failed and so has Russia as well as rich countries which are exhibiting vulnerability to attacks on their currencies and stock markets.

Dr Mahathir said this at the Second Tokyo International Conference on African Development here.

The three-day conference is being attended by leaders and officials of 52 African countries, Asia, North America and Europe. Asian nations such as China, Malaysia, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia are taking part in the conference for the first time.

Admitting that today countries in East Asia seem to have failed, Dr Mahathir said "... it is not really due to the Asian way. The failure is due to something unforeseen".

Currency trading and raids on stock markets are not the fault of Asians or their ways or value system. "Any country subjected to such destructive attacks will fail", Dr Mahathir said, to which an African delegate in the audience agreed saying: "How true".

The Prime Minister pointed out that "... there is much to learn from the Asian weaknesses also", and "... much to be gained from avoiding these weaknesses".

While European-style capitalism should be avoided, Europeans have a lot to contribute as well. Besides, the Europeans themselves are not averse to working with and for Africans. In this context, he disclosed that France was willing to work closely with Japan and Malaysia in assisting Africa to develop.

The three have initiated a trilateral co-operation to assist Africa. The initiative, according to Dr Mahathir, is "premised on African countries taking ownership of their development and with the overarching objective of building a partnership rather than a donor-recipient relationship".

With this unique approach, Malaysia, France and Japan hope to contribute in a modest way, to promoting the social and economic development of African countries.

Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, in his opening address at the conference, said Japan would take advantage of the "trilateral co-operation framework for Africa" to emphasise human resource development.

Notwithstanding the "severe economic crisis" which has gripped many countries in Asia, including Japan, Obuchi invited all "to unite with us in applying sweat and wisdom to open a path towards Africa's bright future", adding that "a friend in need is a friend indeed".

Dr Mahathir said it is timely that Asian countries like Japan and to a lesser extent Malaysia and others stretch out a helping hand. "It will not cost the Asians much and they will eventually be amply repaid."

As much as Japan profited from Malaysia's prosperity, Japan and France will "profit even more from African development and prosperity".

While African Governments are keen to develop their countries and the well-being of their people, they are handicapped by poverty and the lack of experience and expertise.

Thus, Japan and France and even Malaysia are in a position to help the Africans overcome their shortcomings. Dr Mahathir said they can help set up job-creating industries. Africans are very skilful and with little orientation the basic skills can be turned into industrial skills. Industries should do well in African countries, as they have done in Southeast Asia.

Describing Japan's interest in Africa as "most welcome" Dr Mahathir said countries in Africa have lost "almost half a century". Malaysia, he added, had tried in a small way to help. "But we are a developing country with meagre resources. With Japan and France pitching in I am sure we can make up for the loss of time."

Africans, Asians and Europeans will benefit from the stabilisation and prosperity of Africa brought about by the co-operative efforts of three continents, the Prime Minister said.

He hoped the conference would help everyone to focus on Africa as "there is everything to gain and nothing to lose by prospering Africa, a close neighbour in a shrinking world".

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