

28 JUL 1998
Mahathir-Globalisation
REVIEW GLOBALISATION, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: Zulkefli Salleh

SWAKOPMUND (Namibia) July 28 (Bernama) -- Datuk Dr Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called for a review of globalisation to ensure it is fairly implemented and result in a better life for everyone in the world.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia believed in globalisation for all the good things it would bring as promised by its proponents.

"But like everything else, globalisation needs to be carefully handled. It is a means, not an end. It must result in a better life for everyone in this world. If it does not then we have to reexamine it, not to do away with it, but to eliminate what is harmful and promote what is good," he said in his talk on "Governance and Smart Partnership" at the Southern Africa International Dialogue (SAID 98) here tonight.

Speaking to about 350 participants who include seven heads of state, Dr Mahathir said globalisation was a great idea whose time had come but it must be interpreted correctly if it was going to bring about a better world.

"Presently we are not too convinced that it is going to be good for us in the developing countries," he said.

Dr Mahathir pointed out that Malaysia had seen the damage done to its economy by a free flow of capital and feared that globalisation might turn out to be like socialism, communism and imperialism once touted as the answer and then discarded as wrong.

But he said Malaysia was willing to give globalisation a try but at its own pace and would like proponents of the ideology to remember that it might be harmful.

"We would like them to accept the need for consulting us and for our complaints and suggestions to be heard and when legitimate be accepted.

"God willing, globalisation may yet be the route to equality for the peoples and the nations of a borderless world," he said.

"Let us form partnerships, smart partnerships. Let us have good governance. But let us not forget that our quest is for the well-being of our people. The best ideology or philosophy means nothing if the results are not justice, fair play and prosperity for us," he said.

He cited Malaysia's automobile industry as a case why nations should be allowed to open up their economies at their own pace in order to build up a strong foundation for industrialised economy.

He said by imposing import tax at a fairly high rate, the country's cars could compete in the local market and this made the industry viable and in the meantime, spun off numerous engineering industries to boost the country's industrialisation.

Due to that policy, Malaysians had to pay for higher prices for cars but Dr Mahathir said the end result was an industrialised and more prosperous country.

If Malaysia were to follow developed countries' argument that it would benefit from "best products at the lowest price" by allowing for unrestricted and tax-free imports of low-cost goods from their highly efficient industries, it would have not industrialised, he said.

He also said that the rich countries, particularly those with vast uncultivated land, should allow for migration of the people from poor countries.

"Just as the financial capital of the rich will benefit poor countries, the hard-working peoples of the poor countries can benefit the rich

countries," he said.

Dr Mahathir said with the collapse of the Communist bloc, the need for capitalism to put on a friendly face was no longer there. "And so capitalism, baleful unmitigated capitalism, is free to do what it likes."

He also spoke of the European mentality of convincing themselves in justifying their quest for exploiting other peoples and nations by the so-called White Man's burden.

Dr Mahathir told the conference about how the Malaysian currency and that of other Southeast Asian countries were attacked by currency traders who impoverished their economies, causing millions of people to lose their jobs.

"We were told that this is how the globalised world functions. The media tells us this and tells us that this turmoil, all this impoverisation of our people and our countries is good for us because they will help us to get good government, help us attract foreign investments," he said.

He said while the market forces were disciplining countries, they were making billions of dollars for themselves and apparently the market forces had to be well-paid for disciplining governments.

"I am sorry but we still think it is a gross injustice. We think it is inhuman to impoverish millions of people in order that capital should flow freely. We think it is unjust to destroy the prosperity of countries in order to realise a globalised world, borderless world," he said.

But Dr Mahathir said Malaysia believed in globalisation and wanted prosperity from free flow of capital.

"But since its effects are not what we expect, can we not ask that there be some rules and regulations governing the flow of capital," he said.

-- BERNAMA

ZKS RM