

PM: Risky to ignore political stability

TOKYO, Mon: Asia ignores political stability at its peril, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad writes in his first newspaper column in Japan.

"Our massive recovery efforts must have a comprehensive aspect," he says in his column, "Dr Mahathir's World Analysis", which will appear every month. "We cannot afford to neglect political stability, social tranquillity and cohesion," he added, warning that "we do so only at our grave peril".

"Unfortunately there is now too much advice from financial experts who do not seem to be too aware that there is a world out there that goes beyond money and finance."

The article in the newspaper's Opinion/Analysis page is published on the first Monday of each month in both its Japanese and English editions as well as through the Internet.

He listed his key ingredients for economic recovery,

"Unfortunately there is now too much advice from financial experts who do not seem to be too aware that there is a world out there that goes beyond money and finance." – Mahathir

including setting priorities.

"Clearly, doing everything humanly possible in order to ensure that foreign bankers are paid does not automatically seem to be a productive or sensible top priority, except in exceptional circumstances."

Mahathir called for focusing resources on key objectives, balance between social, political and economic goals, pragmatism and a "total national effort" by Asian nations including Japan.

While some accused Japan of failing to wake up to the crisis, that could not be said of Malaysia, he said.

The government imposed capital controls last September to insulate the economy, including a fixed exchange rate and banned overseas ringgit trading.

"Since we went against economic orthodoxy and introduced selective currency controls, the economy has retreated from the brink of utter disaster."

Speaking in Sepang this morning on his return from the World Economic Forum in Switzerland, Mahathir said a decision to impose the much-awaited exit tax on foreign capital repatriation will be made within weeks.

He said many people believed that in Asia, the "sun has set. The dragons have been slain. The tigers have become extinct. We are all finished."

Such people will be proven right if Asia cannot summon "the enormous will and the profound creativity to reform, to rebuild, to recover and to once again be fully revitalised." – Agencies

SUN 2 FEB 99