

20/08/1999

PM calls for setting up of an Asian media

A. Kadir Jasin in Beijing

AN IMPORTANT challenge and opportunity for Malaysia and China in the 21st century, said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, was the need to work together with other regional states to set up an Asian media.

This, said the Prime Minister, was due to the overwhelming dominance of Western media reporting on regional and global affairs throughout the present century.

The major concern among East Asian nations, he said, had been the slanted and distorted reporting of global events to Asian audiences and similar reporting of Asia to other parts of the world.

Dr Mahathir was speaking on "Malaysia and China Relations: Challenges and Opportunities in the 21st Century" at the Third Malaysia-China Forum at the China World Hotel. The event was organised by the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (Asli).

He said: "This has led to attempts by some Asian media circles to stem the tide by providing alternative sources of news reporting and dissemination.

"During this decade, East Asian English language newspaper editors have met twice in Kuala Lumpur to discuss the need for informing Asia about Asia by Asia.

"Although since 1995, the Bangkok-based Asia Times had sought to do just that, unfortunately, it was shortlived. The newspaper folded two years later."

Dr Mahathir said while these efforts were commendable, Asia still had a long way to go before it could provide the media balance hoped for.

"While individual country efforts could be undertaken, yet owing to necessary technology and capital, regional joint efforts will undoubtedly be far more effective.

"It would be most helpful if China and Malaysia could jointly lead in such a significant endeavour."

Dr Mahathir also spoke of other challenges and opportunities that Malaysia and China could face together in the new century.

These include ensuring firm economic recovery, making the Asian Monetary Fund a reality, reforming the international financial architecture, restructuring the United Nations Security Council, promoting the Asean regional forum and building the East Asian community of common peace and prosperity.

The Prime Minister said the unprecedented economic crisis had demonstrated the vital need for the setting up of a regional fund as initially proposed by Japan.

Noting that the original Japanese proposal was shot down by the US and IMF, Dr Mahathir said Japan had more recently revived the idea.

He said Malaysia and China could discuss the matter to see how Beijing and Kuala Lumpur together with other regional countries could encourage Japan to realise the idea.

He said although the situation had changed drastically in the last 100 years and Asian nations had cast off the yoke of foreign dominance, the events of the closing years of this century had shown how vulnerable East Asia could be to external forces bent on exploiting its weaknesses.

Dr Mahathir said for mutually beneficial interests and also those of the wider East Asia, both China and Malaysia must rise to the challenges of the coming century and millennium.

(END)