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Mahathir-Values

RELY ON ASIAN VALUES TO DEVELOP, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, March 20 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Asia should not depend solely on outside help to develop but instead should rely on "Asian Values" as a source of strength.

He said although there seemed to be some scepticism about the virtue of Asian values, Asia could capitalise on it in its effort to develop and revitalise the region the "Asian way".

"What I mean by Asian values is an absence of extreme individualism, a sense of responsibility for the community, belief in strong family, reverence for education, frugality, hardwork, national teamwork, a social contract between the people and the state, moral wholesomeness, a free but responsible press, a belief in citizens as stake holders, and last but not least respect for the environment," he said today.

Most of the initiatives would have to come from within the region using its own ingenuity, wisdom, available resources, regional cooperation and a lot of hardwork, he said when opening the Polmet 2000, Kuala Lumpur, conference on Sustainable Urban Development in the New Millennium here.

He said much knowledge, know-how and capacity for improved decision-making were now available in Asia, but there was a great need for mechanisms that can transform what an individual, group or nation knows into something that others can use.

Also present at the opening was Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding. About 60 international experts will talk on various urban development topics at the three-day conference.

Dr Mahathir said new forms of communication technologies available allowed the people to access and assess scientific and technical knowledge that was needed to solve local problems and enhance the quality of lives.

He said it was imperative for Asia that growth must be revived as this was where the links between economic growth, the alleviation of poverty and environmental conditions were essential.

The disparity between poverty and wealth, levels of development and consumption among nations presented contrasting pictures when the developed and developing countries were compared, the Prime Minister said.

Dr Mahathir said the annual increase in the US population of 2.6 million people put more pressure on the world's resources than the 17 million people added in India each year.

"Unless developed countries choose less resource-intensive lifestyles and develop less polluting technologies, it will be impossible to make the transition to a sustainable world economy," he said.

He said studies indicated that by using resource more productively, it would be possible in the coming decades to reduce energy and material consumption levels in industrial countries by a factor of four while actually improving the standard of living.

A further comparison between the US and India showed that although the US had five percent of the world's population compared to India's 16 percent, the US used some 25 percent of the world's energy compared with three percent for India, emitted 22 percent of the world's CO2 and accounted for 25 percent of the world's GNP compared with India's three percent and one percent respectively.

"And yet, despite all odds, developing countries like India and others must continue to operate in a world in which the resource gap between the most developing and industrial nations is widening, in which the industrial

world dominates in the rule-making of some key international bodies and has already used much of the Planet's ecological capital."

"This inequality is the Planet's main environmental problem; it is also its main development problem," said Dr Mahathir.

He said international economic relationships posed a particular problem for environmental management in many developing countries, including in Asia where these countries face enormous economic pressure to over exploit their environmental resource base.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians enjoyed a relatively high average standard of living and the housing conditions were much better than in most developing countries.

"The primary objective of Malaysia's housing goal is to ensure that all our citizens, particularly the low-income group, have access to adequate, affordable and good shelter," he said.

The housing provision should be a vehicle for achieving viable and sustainable units of human settlements that not only addressed the physical need for shelter but also national need for social, cultural and ethnic integration, he said.

Dr Mahathir said the government recognised that local authorities have a crucial role to play in developing and implementing policies for sustainable development.

"People need to witness improvement at the local level. Critical to this will be the concept of partnership, bringing together the skills and resources possessed by the government, the private sector and local communities," he said.

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