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Mahathir-Symposium

SET UP ASIAN MONETARY FUND TO HELP EAST ASIA, MAHATHIR TELLS JAPAN

By: D Arul Rajoo

OSAKA, Jan 18 (Bernama) -- Japan, with its financial strength and technology, can accelerate its economic recovery and that of East Asia by increasing investment and setting up the Asian Monetary Fund (AMF), Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said that a major cause of Japan's inability to recover was the unwillingness of the Japanese to consume.

"Well, East Asia can consume what Japan produces, more if Japan helps East Asia to prosper again," Dr Mahathir said in his keynote address at the Mainichi International Symposium, the first part of the "Wake Up Kansai" campaign held to revive the sluggish economy in the Kansai region.

This, said Dr Mahathir, could be done by going back to its old strategy of producing high quality low cost goods which could be sold to East Asia.

"You don't have to stop trading with Europe and America but we will provide you with a big additional market. But first help us to recover by investing in our countries and setting the AMF," he said.

He said East Asian countries, who looked upon Japan as their model, were distressed when the second biggest economy in the world showed signs of failing and for more than a decade seemed unable to pull out of the recession.

"But we are even more distressed when Japan seems to value its relations with America in particular more than with East Asia," he said.

The present economic problem faced by Japan was due almost entirely to its attempt to adopt in toto Western practices and Western norms, Dr Mahathir said.

He said the damage would not be so great and so intractable if the process had been gradual.

"But Japan is trying to change everything overnight. Change is always disruptive but instant or rapid massive change is the most disruptive of all."

Dr Mahathir also cautioned Japan against discarding its old practices in politics, economy and financial management in favour of Western methods and standards.

"Even Japanese youths want to be blondes, work less and play more. The traditional Japanese and Eastern culture is being discarded and replaced with Western culture with disregard for filial piety and discipline," he said.

But emulating in total Western practices may not be the right thing, said Dr Mahathir as the West had conceived, promoted, practised and discarded any number of their perfect ideas and systems.

"Today Japan is copying the ideologies and the economic management systems of the West. I suspect that just as the Japanese East Asian Empire ended in disaster, the Japanese copy of the Western ideologies and systems will have the same end result," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had good reason to doubt the Western recipe for the world as it had been the victim and had seen others suffer even more from the latest Western ideas and concepts.

He called on Asian countries to examine together the liberal democracy and the unfettered market in a borderless world and to determine what to accept, reject and what to modify.

Japan understood Asia and East Asia better than the West, except when it chose to listen to people who did not understand Asians, Dr Mahathir

said.

The Prime Minister urged Japan to learn about its neighbours through its own news gathering network as they would miss myriads of opportunities if they rely on the existing network.

Dr Mahathir also said that he was not a believer in the Asian century but believed that this century should be the century of the world.

"If we enrich all the countries in the world, we will have a fantastically rich market, which can only enrich every country...it is not easy, it will take time and patience but it can be done," he added.

But the countries of East Asia must rekindle their dynamism to enrich themselves first, he said.

In order to once again achieve miracles of growth, they must be allowed to work on their own formulas.

Dr Mahathir said Japan and Asia must rethink human values and take the lead in devising new values and norms where might is not right.

"Asian values should form the basis of these new universal values. We have to begin in East Asia. We have to begin here because we have shown that we have the right approach to the enrichment of our people," he added.

By cooperating with each other, trading, investing, transferring technologies and actually carrying out voluntary services on a massive scale, East Asia could be transformed into a region of wealthy nations where there would be no poverty.

Dr Mahathir said Japan together with East Asia must proffer their solutions to the world's financial and economic problems and so ensure better relations among the nations of the world.

"It is not good for Japan and Asia to become prosperous through mutual understanding if it is not going to result in prosperity for the rest of the world," he said.

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