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Work together with East Asia, Japan told

Kamarul Yunus in Tokyo

TOKYO, Thurs: Japan can help Asian countries and itself to recover from the recent economic crisis if they work together for a better world, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

In this regard, Dr Mahathir reiterated his call for the setting up of the Asian Monetary Fund and urged Japanese businessmen to invest in Malaysia and other Asian countries.

"For East Asia to recover faster, Japan must play a big role. Japan has the financial strength and the technology to contribute towards East Asia's recovery and growth," he told a symposium on promoting mutual understanding between Asia and Japan, especially Kansai, organised by the Mainichi Shimbun, here today.

Dr Mahathir, who arrived here today, is on a four-day working visit.

Noting that a major cause of Japan's inability to recover is the unwillingness of the Japanese to consume, Dr Mahathir said East Asia can consume more Japanese products if Japan helps East Asia to prosper again.

"Please go back to your old strategy of producing high-quality low-cost goods and you can sell them to East Asia. You (Japanese) don't have to stop trading with Europe and America but we will provide you with a big additional market.

"But first help us recover by investing in our countries and setting up the Asian Monetary Fund," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Japan understands Asia and East Asia better than the West. However, it chooses to listen to those people who do not understand Asians.

"Learn about us through your own news-gathering network. If you rely on existing news network, you will miss a lot of opportunities. If you get true reports, you will help create a better understanding not only between you and us but also between East Asian and Asian countries," he said.

Acknowledging that Malaysia, as well as some of the East Asian countries considered Japan the role model, the Prime Minister said the region is concerned about Japan's economic health as it is of Japan's success which encouraged these countries' faith in themselves.

"And so we are distressed when Japan showed signs of failing and for more than a decade is unable to pull out of the recession. We are even more distressed when Japan values its relations with America in particular, more than with East Asia," he said.

Dr Mahathir added that Japan and Asia must work together for a better world where economic battles to the death are replaced by friendship and understanding, mutual respect and mutual gains.

"If we want to build mutual understanding between Asia and Japan, it must not be exclusively for our own good. It must also be for the purpose of showing to the rest of the world that mutual understanding is better than the imposition of foreign values and methods on people who are not ready for them.

"Prospering each other is far better than forcing down the throats of others the perfect value and ideologies that you have conceived. Remember you yourselves have in the past rejected those values and ideologies as well as the cost that had to be paid," he said.

He said the effort to prosper other countries must not be limited to Japan and Asia but beyond.

"I believe that the prosperous must help those who are not. 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.

"Just as Kansai's prosperity will enrich Japan, so should Asia's prosperity enrich the world," he said.

Expressing concern that Japan is trying to emulate the West, particularly the Americans, Dr Mahathir said not everything produces by the West is good.

"We in Malaysia have good reason to doubt the new Western recipe for the world. We have been the victim and we have seen others suffer even worse from the latest Western ideas and concepts.

"And so all of us should put our heads together to examine liberal democracy and the undeferred market in a borderless world and to determine what we should accept, what we should reject and what we should modify," he said.

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