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Work together to be strong, Dr M tells Asian nations

ASIAN countries must work together to be strong in a world where might rules, governments must have a sound financial administration to overcome attacks by currency traders and Malaysia is still looking east to Japan to avoid economic pitfalls.

These were some of the views of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when he replied to questions from guests who attended his lecture, "Globalisation, Global Community and the United Nations" at the United Nations University in Tokyo yesterday.

The Prime Minister was invited to deliver the inaugural address of the U Thant lecture series.

Dr Mahathir replied in his typical candid and frank style to questions on his views of the East Asian economy in a globalised world.

On the World Trade Organisation, Dr Mahathir said Asian and the poorer countries wanted to know agenda for the next round of talks.

"We want to determine the agenda to give poorer countries time to study and determine their stand.

"Alone, we cannot make an impact at all. We need to talk and come out with a common stand."

For a more equitable world, Dr Mahathir spoke of a need for an agency to be entrusted to collect taxes from the rich economies from which funds could be used to build infra-structure in poor countries.

On how to deal with rogue currency traders should there be another round of attacks, Dr Mahathir said governments must get their act together, ensuring that their financial administration is strong and they have substantial reserves.

Governments must also monitor closely the economic situation of their countries and take immediate measures to rectify any troublesome movement, as Malaysia has been doing.

He cited as an example when the government noticed a property overhang in the country, steps were taken to take property out of the market through various devices.

On whether Malaysia was still looking east to Japan, Dr Mahathir said the country was still doing so although it was "looking everywhere, the West and in fact, to Latin America".

He said Malaysia had learnt much from Japan, particularly the Japanese work ethics, its production and manufacturing sector as well as its business systems.

"We have benefited from the right things. We are also learning from Japan the wrong things to avoid," he said.

Dr Mahathir was also asked for his views on a common currency in the region to which he said he believed one day there would be "but not now".

He said this was because Asia was a region of contrasts where one country's economic development differs from another.

He pointed out that even the Euro took a long time to be developed, given that the European Union (once the EEC) had been so long in existence.

Dr Mahathir, in a departure to questions on the economy, was asked his views on the need for regional military co-operation to contain problems in the area.

He said he did not believe in military co-operation because it "pre-supposes an enemy is around".

In the long-term, he said this would give rise to an arms race because suspicion and aggression might be created among neighbouring countries.

All this, Dr Mahathir said was "very nasty" in a world that was already spending too much on arms.

On good governance, Dr Mahahir said it was looking after the rights of everybody.

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