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Mahathir-Asia

ASIA MUST RID ITSELF OF ITS HISTORICAL BAGGAGE, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: Salbiah Said

TOKYO, June 3 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that if Asia is to play a role in shaping the New World Order, the first thing it must do is to rid itself of its historical baggage.

"Perhaps Asians should remind themselves that they were civilised long before the Europeans emerged from their caves," he said at the 15th anniversary symposium of the Institute for International Policy Studies (IIPS) at Hotel Okura here.

In his keynote address on "The Asian Dimension under the New World Order: Evolving Paradigms in Asia and Japan", Dr Mahathir shared his thoughts with the audience comprising academicians and researchers, on what Asia could do to get out of the mental block.

"Asians have their own ways. We should not try to impose our way as the Europeans like to do. We should devise our own systems and prove their goodness by applying them to ourselves first.

"If Asia wants to play a role in the determination of a new world order, it is necessary that it learns to be more critical of ideas and concepts coming out of the West.

"If it cannot do this, then it is most unlikely to play a meaningful role in the shaping of a New World Order," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that Asia should not adopt a similar approach as the Europeans. "We need not conquer or dominate in order to have our values and ideas accepted. Japan's formula for success has prompted other countries in Asia to adopt it of their own free will," he said.

"If we are successful then others will follow. If we fail, then we should be prepared to modify or reject.

"We must never be so fanatical about our own creations that even when we fail or we get bad results, we continue to insist on upholding them. Results are far more important than ideologies or systems.

"We may feel lonely sometimes as we flounder about and meet violent oppositions. But there is no perfect system. We must never be trapped into accepting all and every interpretation of the initial ideas or systems," said Dr Mahathir.

"On the other hand, we must be willing to lend our ears to adverse comments and criticisms in order to improve on the original idea.

"It is not impossible for Asians to accept and blend their ideas with those of the Europeans and others. The result would still reflect Asian inputs, Asian contribution to a new world order," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that globalisation had effectively made the whole world into one single country. "Is it not right that the rich countries should contribute to the development of the poor countries?" he said.

The rich, said the prime minister, had undertaken to contribute 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP) to aid the poor, and nearly all of them had reneged on their promise. And so the poor had remained poor, he said.

"The poor should not believe that the world owes them a living, but on the other hand, if the rich became rich by exploiting the poor either directly or indirectly, it is fair that the rich help raise the poor from their debilitating poverty.

"The rich are right in not wanting the money they contribute to be squandered by inefficient governments. There is a Chinese saying that when

a man begs for food, give him a fishing rod. He will then be free from hunger always.

"So give a fishing rod to the poor countries by building for them the necessary infrastructures so they may export their products and import their needs at reasonable prices.

"Airports, railways, roads, water supply and electricity, will do this. Even as these are being built, the jobs created would benefit the people. And without doubt, that benefit will be self-multiplying," he said.

"I will admit that this was my proposal at a conference in Boao, China. There was a deafening silence. It is right to advocate the removal of borders so that wealth of a country can be exploited by the rich but to return some of that wealth to the exploited country meets with utter silence.

"I believe truly that Asians can contribute, positively to the creation of a new world order which redistributes the bounty of this earth in a much more equitable way. That should be the Asian dimension under the new world order," said Dr Mahathir.

The Europeans, he said, claimed that their values were in fact universal values and that there was no such thing as Asian values. "If there are, then they must be wrong or inferior. And so today's universal values are basically European," he said.

"The nation state is a European concept, along with ideas about human rights, freedom and democracy. And now, we have to accept borderlessness and globalisation which effectively denies the independence of nations. And Asia does not protest," the prime minister said.

"Although it is seemingly a reversal of European thinking, it can be just a ploy to break down the barriers to their exploitation of the wealth of the entities created by their idea of nation states, independence and freedom. They themselves would remain very much nation states by other means," he said.

Asians, he said, had never reversed a concept promoted by the Europeans.

"They would feel guilty of not acceding to universally accepted values and ideas as propounded by European propaganda. And yet when the Europeans apparently reversed their ideas Asians feel bound to accept them.

"It would seem that Asians are not merely bereft of ideas but they suffer from a mind block which prevents them from critically examining whatever thoughts emanate from the Europeans and when necessary reject them.

"They would not be able to reject the nation state in favour of globalisation if it had not been initiated by the Europeans," he said.

"Of course there were faults in the old system of international trade. But must the answer be total free trade and the removal of national boundaries? Cannot there be something less extreme?" he said.

But Asians, said Dr Mahathir, did not question the idea of free trade and the accompanying changes. Asians not only accepted them but many ardently believed that they were good in themselves, and even after their prosperous economies were being destroyed by this regime, they had not altered their commitment, he said.

On the other hand, most European countries rejected free trade when it hurt them and did not hesitate to bail out their hedge funds, automobile industries and airlines, said Dr Mahathir, noting that their farming was strongly protected, and at the slightest threat, they would impose countervailing duties and other non-tariff barriers.

At the same time, transparency was vigorously advocated in all business dealings, he said.

But hedge funds whose dealings were far bigger than the value of total

world trade, need not be transparent, he added, and yet, these funds could cause great harm to the economy of countries and of whole regions.

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