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Mahathir-Formula

ASIA SET FOR A RENAISSANCE, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: Salbiah Said

TOKYO, June 5 (Bernama) -- Asia is ripe for a rebirth, a renaissance. It has been a long time in coming but the conditions are right for a New Asian Order.

In a nutshell, this is the message that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is conveying, in what is seen as his last keynote address at the Nikkei conference as Malaysia's Prime Minister before his planned retirement in October.

These were actually Dr Mahathir's introductory remarks as he set the tone of his speech at the ninth conference on "The Future of Asia: Genesis of a New Asian Order" here today.

After Tuesday's thought-provoking speech themed the New World Order, Dr Mahathir also outlined his formula for a New Asia Order.

What in fact should a New Asian Order be like? asked Dr Mahathir.

"Should it be like the Europe of the post-war years when bitter enemies embrace each other, slowly at first, but more rapidly and more widely with the passage of time; embrace each other to form what in fact is the United States of Europe?

"Or should Asian countries ally themselves with the powerful countries of the West against potential Asian enemies? Or should they remain separate, eyeing each other with distrust, ready to go for each other's throats?

"Or could there be a fourth or a fifth alternative? Should they form regional alliances in order to compete with each other or something else altogether?"

Whatever may be the choice, the decision must be taken by Asians and not by anyone else, said Dr Mahathir.

Asians, he said, must realise that unless they contribute to a New World Order, it was likely to disadvantage them in the long run.

"If there is anything about Europe that Asians must emulate, it is the willingness to forget and forgive. Asians are still bugged by their past quarrels and wars, the atrocities and the shame of foreign rule. And because of this, they find it exceedingly difficult to cooperate for the common good," he said.

In this atmosphere, Dr Mahathir said, a united Asia is unthinkable, noting that Old Asia had shown it could not handle the ideological dominance of Europe.

"We do not need the kind of abuses the present financial regime are open to. The currency traders contributed nothing to our well-being. Still we Asians have said nothing.... If the ideas are ours, then our concerns and interests will be taken care of," he said.

In a global village, Asia cannot really regenerate in isolation, said the premier.

"We are merely being instructed to do things and even forced into participating without our ideas being taken into consideration.

"It is not right that we should be dragged into the fight against terrorism without being given a say in the planning and execution of the strategies adopted," he said.

In proposing that Asia must devise its own formula for governance, the Prime Minister said that if a country is unable to practise liberal democracy, then it should be allowed to be less liberal.

"Demonstration, national strikes, media excesses and the negation of

the role of government may enhance the democratic ideology but they are not absolutely essential to the democratic process."

Asia, he said, needed to devise its own financial and economic institutions in keeping with its values and needs.

"A single currency is not for Asia for a very long time to come. But a trading currency can be devised which relates to the other trading currencies of the world. Asian currencies should each have their own exchange rate against the trading currency," said Dr Mahathir.

An Asian trading group should also be aimed at, he said, noting that it must not be rigid. It should be oriented to help the poor countries obtain reasonable prices for their export while paying equally reasonable prices for their imports, he added.

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