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Mahathir-Japan

JAPAN REMAINS A ROLE MODEL FOR DEVELOPING NATIONS, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 10 (Bernama) -- Japan has been a model and an inspiration for Malaysia and the Southeast Asian nations, former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"Malaysia and, I am quite sure many of the Southeast Asian countries, were very impressed at how Japan recovered so quickly from the devastations of the Pacific War to become an economic power house.

"There must be some things that the Japanese were doing which were worthy of emulating by countries wishing to develop," Dr Mahathir said in his keynote address at the "Symposium Towards the Future of Asean" organised by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fukuoko Prefecture, Mainichi Newspapers and RKB Broadcasting, in Fukuoka.

The text of his speech was received here today.

He said it was the Japanese work ethics and the close collaboration between the government and the private sector, the much criticised Japan Incorporated concept, which contributed to the Japanese miracle.

"There are of course the Japanese corporate structure and management practices which enabled Japanese corporations to recover and grow so quickly and successfully. Malaysia was anxious to learn about these and adopt them where possible."

Dr Mahathir also said that the Japanese strategy of low-cost quality products managed to dominate the Asian and African markets and overtook the European and American costly products. Eventually it helped to uplift the living standards in developing economies.

"Left to the Europeans, the poorer peoples of Asia and Africa would not be able to enjoy many of the modern necessities such as home appliances, pick-up trucks and cars.

"Their standards of living would therefore remain much lower than the standards of living of the Europeans," said Dr Mahathir.

Politically, he said, Japan did not see eye to eye with many Southeast Asian countries but instead aligned itself closely with the United States.

"But these political differences have seldom got in the way of good relations between Japan and Southeast Asia. We are all pragmatic. Japan has shown no desire to be a deputy sheriff," he added.

However, despite the Japanese success story, one of the greatest disappointments with Japan among Southeast Asians was its reluctance to cooperate through the East Asia Economic Group (EAEG), he said.

"It is difficult to understand why there was this reservation when regional groupings were being formed all over the world. Europe had been consolidating the European economic cooperation ever since the end of the war. It was on the verge of forming the European Union when the EAEG was proposed.

"The Association of Southeast Asian Countries is weak and needed the clout of the Northeast Asian countries, in particular Japan. It is not the intention to become an economic bloc.

"The EAEG would simply be a forum for discussion of common problems and exploring ways of overcoming them together," he said.

"Why the east Asian countries cannot get together the way the Europeans in Europe and the North Americans can is a mystery," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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