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MAHATHIR-POWER

DR MAHATHIR EXPECTS POWER SHIFT TO EAST ASIA

KUALA LUMPUR, July 28 (Bernama) -- Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad today predicted that there would be a power shift from North America and Europe to countries of East Asia in 50 years time.

"This power shift would result from the dynamic people of East Asia," he said in reference to the bigger countries of this region, comprising China, Japan, South Korea, India and "some" South East Asian countries.

These countries have a huge population base comprising hardworking, dedicated, clever, educated people keen and ready to move forward, he said at the luncheon talk entitled "Malaysia in Asia-Challenges, Responses and Opportunities" at the Third Asia Economic Summit, here.

Dr Mahathir said the economic progress experienced by Japan, South Korea and now China and India had led to this fact.

"There is no doubt that one of the biggest powers in East Asia will be China. China has a population of 1.3 billion of very clever, very hardworking and very able people," said Dr Mahathir, who was the Prime Minister for 22 years before stepping down in October 2003.

He said that China would one day grow to become the biggest economic power in the East with their homegrown technology, researches and discoveries that could benefit mankind.

Dr Mahathir expects that the Chinese now residing in the West would one day move to the increasingly prosperous China and contribute towards the advancement of science and technology in that country.

This, he said, was similar to how Japan emerged after the Second World War, and later South Korea where their advancement in science and technology started based on what was available in the West.

"And when you think of China as a country that is bigger than Europe and North America combined, and think of it as having the same technological superiority as Europe and the United States, then you will have a fair idea of the role and position of China in the future as an economic power and an advanced country in terms of sciences."

Assuming that China' population achieve half the per capita income of the US of US\$20,000 per annum, he said, the country would become "tremendously rich" and offer big markets for Malaysia's exports like the palm oil.

Acknowledging that China may pose as a threat to Malaysia's electronics industry, he said, the country's imports of Malaysia's palm oil was expected to rise further.

With the region becoming more prosperous due to a richer China, he said: "The market in this part of the world is going to be the dominant market of the world.

"This is where the money is going to be made. This is where the money is spent and anyone will want to sell things to this huge market."

Dr Mahathir also said mobility of people in the future may result in no one country having one dominant ethnic population, except for China.

"This is simply because there are too many Chinese to dilute," he said in jest.

"The world is going to be very Chinese whether we like it or not," he added.

Turning to China's potential military might, Dr Mahathir said he didn't believe that China would be too aggressive unless it was provoked.

He, however, said China had the ability to become a great military

power but had not exercise that power yet.

Unlike European countries, he said history had shown that China had never shown any ambition to conquer, invade or colonise other Asian countries.

Instead it has chosen to establish strong trade relationship with these countries.

"I don't think we need to be too afraid of China. We should not regard it as a threat but we should prepare ourselves for a prosperous China," he said.

He felt that China needed to do more public relations to quash such negative perception (the threat). -- BERNAMA

MAD KTC