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Need for alternative third way forward

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THE world needs a "new view of development."

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement that the "interpretive" Third World War had already begun is correct.

Unlike Samuel P. Huntington's analysis of the problem, it is not just a clash of civilisations but rather a clash of worldviews; of what a global view of and for the world should be like.

"Worldview" has two components; a belief system which informs and propounds normative perspectives, and an action-frame that guides behaviour in the here and now.

Using this worldview model, I would like to both agree and disagree with Farish Noor's latest "statement of the modern problem" in his review of the Mecca-cola brand of coke (NST, March 1).

His argument that the world needs more original thinking is on the spot. But it is difficult to concur with the view that the American worldview is the source of the problem.

The problematic worldview is "modernity" as a civilisational vision. It is modern. It is neither American nor Western.

Whether in Silicon Valley, Silicon Alley (in New York), or in our own Silicon Island (Penang), what drives mainstream politics and economics of today is the "modern worldview".

This puts a premium on materialistic development focused on economic advancement, and underplays human development of the ethical, moral and spiritual kind.

The evidence can be found in Kuala Lumpur, Kathmandu or Paris. It is reflected in the lifestyle of the rich and the famous. What is latest is thought to be better, and the older is no more fashionable.

It is the worldview of the globalised modern village found freely in all globally connected pockets of this modern lifestyle. Such lifestyles subscribe to a "modern view" of development; and defines "progress" as "bigger and better things to surround ourselves with."

An alternative worldview can also be found worldwide. These connected "non-moderns" reject an entirely materialistic worldview of modern capitalism.

They want a worldview which addresses both modern comforts and social justice. To them, the basic needs are important and necessary prerequisites for all.

They therefore commit themselves to social justice causes for a better tomorrow.

Farish Noor argues that "America's power and influence are neither accidental nor pre-ordained: they are the result of unfair and unequal economic practices in a world governed by market forces that are unbridled and beyond the control of anyone."

The strength and efficacy of American economic imperialism (market capitalism) is no better than Jewish capitalism or even Islamic capitalism.

All capitalistic systems, whether individuals or corporations, view the economic imperative as an end in itself to be achieved at "all costs." In fact, all behave in exactly the same way and are motivated by the smell of a fast buck. Theirs is only an economic expression of the modern worldview.

Malaysian capitalists and corporations also behave in identical ways. In

such a world-view, economics is divorced from moral/ethical dimensions of life. So, why should the case of the French-Tunisian entrepreneur with "Mecca-cola" be any different?

However, no doubt that the Americans have excelled in the fine art of free enterprise and in the use of markets and capital to their own advantage.

But, why not? The alternative vision of ideological communism is today dead in our unipolar world. But is there any real alternative to market capitalism?

Therefore, let us not in our over-exuberance throw out the baby with the bath water. There can be an alternative third way forward.

A Malaysian entrepreneur has launched a non-profit organisation to educate and inform young Malaysians about the Malaysian worldview. Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi graced the occasion and launched a children's comic book on Vision 2020 produced by the foundation.

The actions of this Malaysian entrepreneur as a modern capitalist are exemplary. Having succeeded at a young age in becoming rich, he chooses "to inform and educate the next generation" on the values and virtues of his generation.

That is a more caring model of capitalism. We need less of the ugly capitalists with only a focus on self-improvement and self-glorification.

At the height of our economic exuberance, there were stories of rich individuals who flew to London in their private jets just to buy a new tie. But, whither their jets today?