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'New world order must be based on values indigenous to the region'

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Asia's way of shaping a new world order should be based on values indigenous to the region, such as consensus-seeking and non-confrontation.

Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) senior fellow Steven Wong said Asia's rich diversity of cultures could contribute to economic and social progress.

"The Prime Minister has argued before that while the Asian way may not achieve the same degree of success as the West, we are not faced with their extent of moral and social degradation," he said.

"Asia's way should be based on values of the region, not antagonistic, non-confrontational, without posturing and with consensus-building."

Wong was commenting on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's speech "The Asian dimension under the new world order - evolving paradigms in Asia and Japan". Dr Mahathir made this speech at the Institute for International Policy Studies in Tokyo.

The Prime Minister said that if Asia wanted a role in shaping the world, it had to rid itself of its "historical baggage", to be critical of Western ideas and to be original in thought.

Wong listed the negative impact of colonialism as the "first and foremost" baggage that needed to be removed, as it continued to affect the way Asians operated today.

"Colonialism was not only of territory but of minds, ideas and values, resulting in psychological domination and subservience.

"This is what makes us uncreative and derivative instead, we are mere users all the time without the ability to create.

"Worse still, we have come to accept being like this," Wong added.

He cited Japan and Taiwan as parts of Asia which were not colonised and have become economic and industrial successes.

Wong agreed that there were positive elements in Western culture and values but called for equal appreciation of Asian principles.

International Movement for a Just World (JUST) president Dr Chandra Muzaffar said he agreed with the Prime Minister that Asia should be critical of Western ideas and concepts.

Chandra said contemporary western capitalism, liberalisation and deregulation, which Dr Mahathir had called "harmful ideas", were in opposition to some of Asia's fundamental religious and cultural values.

"Private gain takes precedence over public good."

"These are contrary to values we cherish such as sharing and giving, and exercising restraint over our wants and desires," Chandra said.

He also highlighted other Western concepts that went against Asian principles.

These were separating rights from responsibilities, placing the individual in an adversarial relationship with the community and stripping culture of its moral content.

However, on removing historical baggage, Chandra said Asians should be critical of certain aspects of their tradition, such as unquestioning loyalty to authority without public accountability.