Dr Mahathir calls on Asian leaders to ‘assert true leadership’ or ‘face contempt of their own people’

‘Asian leaders too Euro-centric’

By Khushwant Singh

ASIAN leaders continue to blindly ape the West and lack the ability to look critically at the ideas and thoughts coming from there, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed said yesterday.

“Asian leaders and Asians in general have yet to achieve freedom of thought, freedom to look critically at the ideas and ideologies coming from outside Asia,” the former Malaysian prime minister said at the 2nd Ho Rih Hwa Leadership in Asia Public Lecture at Suntec City. “They are still beholden to the ethnic Europeans.

They are still Euro-centric.”

He called on Asian leaders to assert themselves. “Assume and assert true leadership, seize the initiative in terms of ideas and thoughts, and restore self respect, or face the humiliation of foreign hegemony and the contempt of their own people,” he said.

In a scathing attack on the West, and in particular against the US’ invasion of Iraq, Dr Mahathir noted: “It does not strike the democrats as odd that democracy should be imposed by force from outside and not brought about democratically from inside.”

Accompanied by his wife, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah, Dr Mahathir, 79 decried Asian leaders’ acceptance of the West’s interference in their internal affairs.

He said: “They have yet to differ, much less object. Some even lend support to undemocratic actions by the Europeans to ‘democratise’ Asia.”

Pointing out that civilisation began in Asia and Asians had complex government systems when Westerners were still clothed in animal skin, he said that Asian leaders today are led by the West.

He said: “When the East Asian Economic Caucus was proposed as a logical move following the setting up of the European Union and Nafta (North America Free Trade Agreement), we meekly waited for the official approval of the Americans.”

He added that Asians had to be educated about democracy because unlike in the West, where there are only two or three political parties and it was likely that one party would get majority support and form a government that has credibility and authority, Asians tend to have dozens of parties fighting for the right to lead.

Votes, too, were divided into dozens of factions based on race, religion or regions so it was unlikely that elections would give rise to a strong government.

“The result is democratic anarchy. The people suffer from too much democracy,” Dr Mahathir said.

Some in the West also suspected a government of being non-democratic if it stays in power for a long time, he said to laughter from the 2,000-odd audience.

Dr Mahathir asked: “But if people chose to return the same party and the same leader to power, is it not a democratic right of the people to do so, provided proper elections are held?

“No leader or party which is absolutely rotten will be returned again and again by the electorate.”