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West urged to adapt to rising power in the East

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The reason Europe and the United States are struggling to make it through the economic crisis is because they are slow in accepting the fact that their era of domination is coming to an end, a Singaporean scholar says.

At the launch of his book, *The New Asian Hemisphere*, public policy professor Kishore Mahbubani said that Asia's rise to power was imminent and the West needed to quickly adjust to it for their own benefit.

"Europe and the US have difficulties accepting the fact that when the world changes, they must adapt. This idea has not sunk in yet," he said in Jakarta on Monday.

He said that, when he first published his book in 2008, he received tremendous resistance from Western readers who branded the book an "anti-Western polemic". However, following the global economic crisis in 2008-2009 and the current calamities in Europe and the US, more people in the West were becoming aware of the need to adapt to change.

"Had they heeded and been aware of the warnings, they would have been psychologically better prepared for the crises that came," he said.

According to Kishore, Asia has managed to slowly impose itself on the world after finding and adopting at least seven "pillars of wisdom", which the West had used to help itself dictate to Asia for the last two centuries. Those pillars included implementation of a free economic market, science and technology and the rule of law.

He said that Asia, however, should not expect a smooth upward rise as there would be storms and challenges along the way, such as rising political tensions and the surge of the middle class.

The Southeast Asian countries, he predicted, would be the backbone of Asia's power surge. The importance of ASEAN could already be seen by how heads of states from other regions were willing to attend the recent ASEAN summit in Bali.

"I think ASEAN will be the center of it. It is the only place where leaders of nations can comfortably sit and talk with each other about various problems," he said.

Paramadina University rector Anies Baswedan, who acted as one of the book's discussants, said that ASEAN nations, and Indonesia in particular, needed to pay more attention on the development of their

people, if they were to play a commanding role in Asia's growth.

“Indonesia must put its emphasis on education to produce better human resources. We must start to invest more in our people, rather than our commodities,” he said.

Fellow discussant, Tony Prasetyantono, an economist from the University of Gadjah Mada, said that it was Asia's unique education and culture that would allow it to emerge as a power to be reckoned with.

“Asia is considered the next world powerhouse because of its hard working people, its education and its willingness to accept an open economy,” he said. (awd)

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