

India can play bridge-builder, China can't: Mahbubani

China may be rising, but it is India which is uniquely poised to play a 'bridge-building role' in an Asian century and emerge as a modern power synthesising the best of the East and the West, says Kishore Mahbubani, Singapore's former envoy to the UN and a strategic thinker.

'India has a tremendous responsibility to play a bridge building role in this new world. China can't be a bridge builder. Japan tried and failed. India can succeed,' Mahbubani, dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, told IANS in an interview on a recent visit here.

'Japan emerged as a Western power. China will emerge as an Eastern power. India will bring together the best of the East and the West, if it succeeds in its current modernization efforts,' said Mahbubani, confidently predicting that this century will break the spell of two centuries of Western domination and bring Asian powers firmly on the global stage.

The author, described by The Economist as 'an Asian Toynbee preoccupied with the rise and fall of civilisations,' is scornful of those spin doctors who mistakenly see the US using India as a counterweight to rising China.

'Why should India be somebody else's card? For a huge country like India, it makes equal sense for India to use the US as a card,' he said when asked whether he shared this perception.

'India should have an independent foreign policy which it has. The big mistake for India will be to behave like the UK. The moral of the story is: Don't be somebody's card,' stressed Mahbubani, who was born to an immigrant Indian family in the then British colony of Singapore.

Mahbubani, the author of 'Beyond The Age of Innocence: Rebuilding Trust Between America and the World' and 'Can Asians Think,' triggered the Asian values debate of the 1990s with his incisive essay 'The West and the Rest'. His next book maps out the rise of Asia and resistance it may face from the world's leading powers, including the US.

'Asia will soon have three of the largest economies of the world. In the last two centuries only, [Europe](#) took over the global stage. The preceding 18 centuries were dominated by Asian powers,' says Mahbubani, who is puzzled by the 'unnatural' domination of the world by Western powers, which account for just 12 percent of the world's population.

'There is an unwritten rule that the head of the IMF must be a European and that of the World Bank an American. It disqualifies 3.5 billion Asian people from holding top posts in leading multilateral institutions,' he said, adding, 'Let's not forget Asian powers have

a trillion dollars in foreign reserves.'

'The Americans have shown dazzling incompetence in Iraq and in the Middle East. There is clearly a need for change, for a larger say of Asian powers in the world,' he argued.

Mahbubani anticipates resistance from the current Western powers to the rise of Asia, but is confident that a new system of Asiatic values, revolving around tolerance and consensus-building,

will emerge with the rise of India and China on the global stage.

'Resistance is natural. However, in order to change things, the rising Asian powers need to apply psychological pressure on them and present a coherent vision of the world,' said the author, who served Singapore's foreign service for over three decades.

Mahbubani, Singapore's former ambassador to the UN and former president of the Security Council, is convinced that the G-4 process 'is not working' and the G4 countries, including India, Japan, Germany and Brazil, need a fresh approach to the whole issue of UN reforms.

'The problem is that all 193 countries are sailing in the same boat with each one looking after its own cabin but no one is looking after the boat,' he said. 'India can't go and ask to be given a veto. It should first present a vision on how to manage the global boat,' he stressed.

Manish Chand (© IANS / India eNews)