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China's int'l influence at all-time peak: Singapore expert

China's international influence is at an all-time peak now, and the country needs to engage in new thinking in international affairs as it moves forward to create another 60 years of peace and prosperity for the Chinese people, a well-known Singapore expert said.

In an exclusive interview with Xinhua, Kishore Muhibubani, dean of Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, said that the whole world is truly impressed by the speed and scale of China's economic development. This is why hundreds of foreign delegations visit China each year to learn the reasons for China's spectacular successes.

Kishore said that many in the West are troubled that China is not following the Western development model, it is amazing that many in the West are not aware that if China had followed the Western model, the Chinese could have suffered as much as Russians did after Gorbachev had followed the Western model.

Only 12 percent of the world's population live in the West, and 88 percent live in the rest of the world. The rest of the world understands better how difficult it was for China to maintain both political stability and rapid economic growth. Hence, there is greater admiration for China in the rest of the world, he added.

Kishore pointed out that one reason why China's standing is high in Asia is because China has wisely decided to share its prosperity with all of its Asian neighbors. This explains why the fastest growing trade flows in the world are the trade flows between China and its neighbors. China should continue these wise policies.

The dean spoke highly of China's move to sign the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the ten-member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). He said that China made a brilliant move by proposing a FTA to the ASEAN countries.

Even though ASEAN had enjoyed longer trading relations with United States, Europe and Japan, China was the first country to propose, negotiate and conclude a FTA with ASEAN. If it succeeds in enhancing the economic growth and prosperity of both China and ASEAN, it will further enhance China's standing in Asia, he said.

As for the problems or challenges China will have or face, he said that China will face two major problems in the international arena in the coming decades. The first will be in the area of global governance, and the second will be in the areas of geopolitics.

In his opinion, the first big challenge that China faces is whether it can take over the leadership and maintenance of the open multilateral trading order from the United States and Europe. The second challenge will be in the area of geopolitics.

Kishore believes that the three biggest powers in 2050 will be China, India and the United

States. The best solution for the world will be for all three powers to have equally good relations with each other. This would create a stable triangle of geopolitics. Hence, the second challenge China faces is to develop equally good relations with India to create a stable geopolitical triangle.

There have been several reasons why China has been able to emerge peacefully as a great power with its rapid economic growth, he said, one reason has been the open multilateral order of 1945 created by the United States and Europe. Another reason is that China has heeded the advice of Deng Xiaoping to "be good at keeping a low profile".

However, the formulas that China followed for the past 30 years may not work for the next 30 years. Firstly, China can't take for granted the open multilateral order will be maintained by the United States and Europe. China will have to provide political and intellectual leadership to keep the multilateral order open. Here it will have to work in concert with India and other Asian powers to provide this leadership, he said.

Kishore believes that there is an established vehicle China can use to broaden and deepen cooperation with its fellow-Asian neighbors. That vehicle is ASEAN. He said that China should work even more closely with ASEAN to send a powerful political signal that China can cooperate with its weaker Asian neighbors and work with them to sustain the open multilateral order of 1945.

Kishore said that the second priority of China should be to significantly strengthen its bilateral relationship with India. Overall, the relationship is in good shape. Sino-Indian trade has grown significantly. However, there are some remaining bilateral problems. China should work to resolve these bilateral problems quickly so that it can cooperate with India to strengthen the open multilateral order and to create a stable triangular balance of power between China, India and the United States.

Source: Xinhua