

Dr M on a more meaningful C'wealth

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — The Commonwealth will be more meaningful if member countries can co-operate effectively to overcome common problems, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The gathering of many countries at international meetings had not yielded much result, he told the visiting Commonwealth Secretary-General, Sir Shridath Ramphal, who called on him at his office at Parliament House here.

Also present at the one-hour meeting were Foreign Affairs Minister Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie and the Under-Secretary for Commonwealth and European Affairs, Mr Anthony Yeo.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir also told Sir Shridath that Asean economic co-operation had

been effective because the leaders of the five member countries were able to speak and discuss their common problems with full understanding.

Mr Yeo said that the Prime Minister stressed that Malaysia was not forgetting the Commonwealth altogether but instead wanted to see that the organisation functions more meaningfully.

The two leaders started off their discussions by reviewing the deteriorating international economic situation and Sir Shridath expressed the hope that Malaysia would be able to contribute by injecting new ideas to help overcome the problems.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said that this depended mostly on the ability of developing Commonwealth countries, like Malaysia, to be self-reliant.

He stressed the need to

increase productivity and cut down unnecessary expenditure. "We should be more frugal," he said.

"We have to look at ourselves first," he added.

Sir Shridath said Commonwealth members were receptive to the idea of self-reliance and the movement needed new ideas from Malaysia to resolve the problems.

According to him, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir himself represented "freshness and new ideas" in the Commonwealth.

Sir Shridath said that he was here not to offer anything on behalf of the Commonwealth to Malaysia but to find out what Malaysia could do to make the Commonwealth more meaningful.

The Prime Minister said that Malaysia had in a small way within its resources and

capabilities extended assistance to smaller Commonwealth countries like Papua New Guinea and Fiji.

As a member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), it had donated rice to Mali to help overcome the shortage of food following the severe drought there.

Sir Shridath said such efforts would supplement the activities of the Commonwealth Secretariat in providing a pool of experts to assist member countries requiring training and necessary skills.

On the future of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir hoped that the meeting would serve as a forum of dialogue in injecting and exchanging new ideas on how the members could help each other in overcoming common problems.