

'Help poor nations help themselves'

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MALAYSIA said that concerted and continued efforts are necessary in helping the South Pacific island nations to build up their national resilience and independence.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told the mini Commonwealth summit this morning: "Personally, I believe that we can all do even a little better than what we have done so far."

In a speech kicking off the discussion on regional economic and functional co-operation — the thrust of the summit — Dr Mahathir said

the piecemeal efforts undertaken by a number of countries, including Malaysia, to assist the less fortunate ones, such as the South Pacific island nations, would not generate as rapid an improvement as these countries need.

"However, if concerted and continued efforts are made in this direction, I am positive that we would have gone a long way to help these countries," he added.

"I therefore would like to appeal to others in the CHOGRM region to join us in these endeavours."

Leaders of 15 of the 17-nation Commonwealth nations in the Asia-Pac-

ic region are attending the five-day summit which began on Thursday.

The Indian Prime Minister and the Sri Lankan President have sent their representatives.

Dr Mahathir said this mini summit was most timely from the point of view of learning what projects the island nations of the South Pacific had for their own development.

"We can then consider what concerted action or assistance will be needed to ensure that the projects towards their self-sustained develop-

ment will have a fair start."

Dr Mahathir said regional economic and functional co-operation in the Asia-Pacific region is one way to revitalise the Commonwealth.

"As a matter of fact, the Commonwealth is now on test. If the Commonwealth countries in our region cannot actualise economic and functional co-operation, the prestige of the Commonwealth itself will go down and the effectiveness and value of the Commonwealth will be questioned," said the Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir said he would not deny the fact

that most developing member nations, including Malaysia, had derived certain benefits from their continued membership of the Commonwealth.

Dependence

In this regard, the various programmes of assistance under the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) had been particularly productive.

"However, we would be indulging in self-comfort if we do not at the same time admit that in recent years the clout of the Commonwealth has somewhat diminished," said the Prime Minister.

"It is indeed unfortunate that this situation has come about ironically as a result of the actions or inactions of the prime movers of the Commonwealth themselves."

Dr Mahathir said although Malaysia herself was dependent on technical assistance to accelerate her pace of economic development, in a spirit of co-operation Malaysia had launched a technical assistance programme to assist developing countries which were less fortunate than she was in the context of the Malaysian Technical Assistance Programme (MTAP).

Malaysia had provided technical assistance to a number of South Pacific island countries including Fiji, Western Samoa and the Solomon Islands, as well as to Papua New Guinea.

"It is our intention to concentrate this assistance on those areas that would be particularly beneficial to these countries," Dr Mahathir said.