

Small nations can make an impact: PM

NST 27 APR 1983

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues.

The smaller countries of the developing world can still make an impact and have their voices heard if they work together as a group, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

Speaking to reporters on his return from a nine-day official visit to Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, he said he had stressed this in his talks with the leaders of the three countries.

Countries in the developing world could co-operate and work with one another in improving South-South relations despite the feeling of a majority of them that they were "too small and weak".

The Prime Minister said the Bangladesh, Sri Lankan and Maldivian leaders supported Malaysia's call for more South-South dialogue and co-operation.

They also supported Malaysia's stand on various issues, such as Kampuchea and Afghanistan.

Datuk Seri Dr Ma-

hathir also warned that the oil slick currently worrying the Gulf nations could ultimately affect Malaysia.

It could pose problems for countries in the Indian Ocean, including Sri Lanka and the Maldives, if not contained soon, and "may even come to Malaysia".

On trade and investment, the Prime Minister said a number of areas in which better co-operation could be realised had been identified.

Scholarships

He disclosed the possibility of Malaysia importing more paper and fresh foodstuff from Bangladesh.

The Sri Lankan Government has also agreed to set aside between 700 and 800 acres in Mahaweli for a joint-venture project with Malaysia to grow crops, including spices, which the latter had previously

been importing from other countries.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said that areas of increased co-operation with the Maldives could centre on the fishing and fishmeal industries, canning and tourism.

A Malaysian contractor building an Islamic centre in the Maldives has also agreed to offer five scholarships to Maldivians for training in the construction field in Malaysia.

The Prime Minister hoped that other Malaysian contractors would follow this example.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said Malaysia might receive more people for training from the countries he had visited.

On hand to welcome him home was Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Musa Hitam and other Cabinet members.

Bernama reports from Male that Malaysia and the Maldives have agreed to enter into an economic and technical co-operation agreement.

They also agreed there

was vast scope for the further expansion of bilateral relations.

Regular consultations are to take place to consolidate this.

Economic, technical and cultural ties between both countries are also to be strengthened.

This was contained in a communique issued today at the end of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir's visit to the Island Republic.

It is understood that the Maldives has given an assurance to the private sector that it will assist in the promotion and sale of consumer goods from Malaysia.

At present, the bulk of the island's consumer goods is imported from Singapore.

Full support will also be given to develop new resort islands.

The 30-point communique described the visit as an important landmark in the friendly relations between both countries and it is understood that the Maldives has made an immediate request for assistance in the training of its officials under the Malaysian Technical Co-operation Programme (MTCOP).

On the growing military activities by the big powers in the Indian Ocean, the communique said the two leaders called for the speedy implementation of a United Nations resolution declaring the Indian Ocean a zone of peace.

The President also expressed deep concern over "the danger of mercenaries"

who were being deployed to perpetrate acts of terrorism and subversion in small countries.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir fully supported President Maumoon's views on this and also the measures taken by the international community to ban the recruitment, financing, training and deployment of mercenaries.

The two leaders also called for the urgent promotion of new patterns of co-operation in the spirit of South-South dialogue.

They stressed the need for greater efforts by producer countries to increase their negotiating power and protect their legitimate economic rights.

Malaysia and the Maldives also renewed their appeal to Iran and Iraq for an immediate cessation of hostilities in the interest of Islam and the progress of the ummah.

In reiterating their stand on Afghanistan, the two leaders also stressed the need for a political settlement and the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Soviet troops.

On Kampuchea, they called on the international community to demand that Vietnam immediately cease hostilities and unconditionally withdraw its troops.

Both leaders reaffirmed their support for the Zone of Freedom, Peace and Neutrality (Zofpan) and the need for an early solution to the Kampuchean problem which would remove a serious obstacle to the full realisation of its objectives.

By SHARIFAH ROZITA