

Western values and democracy

From ZAINON AHMAD

DAVOS, Sat. — Western countries must avoid using their own values when judging the democracy practised by the developing nations, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said it was their failure to avoid this that resulted in their seeing policies implemented by the developing nations as improper, and undemocratic.

This had in some ways contributed to the failure in the North-South dialogue, the Prime Minister said when asked why the democratic practices of Third World countries were not up to Western standards.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said it was wrong for the Western countries to judge the democracy practised by the developing nations as "democracy of oppression."

He said Western countries were generally inclined to criticise a Third World Government as "oppressive" whenever there was a group in that country critical of the Government.

"To us, this is a healthy democracy as the Government

concerned allows the existence of the group," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said however that when an Opposition group gained control of the Government and its practices were undemocratic, the Western countries would be quick to say that the previous Government was better.

The situation arose because the West wanted the group it supported to be inclined to the Western system of democracy.

"What the Western countries do not seem to realise is that there are also shortcomings in the democratic system they practice," he said.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia was not spared criticism of its democratic system, as could sometimes be seen in the Western media.

There had been allegations that Malaysia practised "democratic oppression" and that the country was ruled by a dictatorship.

Earlier, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir suggested that Government leaders refrain from making public the decisions of their countries before sitting down to negotiate at peace conferences.

This would give the countries concerned room to manoeuvre and achieve a general consensus without fear of public criticism that they had modified their stand.

He said in this way, peace

conferences would be able to achieve their objectives faster.

The fear of the home public often caused the stand adopted by the countries sitting down at the negotiating table to be rigid.

"This does not mean that proceedings of peace conferences should not be reported," he said when speaking at the plenary session of the EMF Davos symposium on *International Security in 1984: How Can we Unblock the Situation?*

The other speakers of the session, chaired by former French Prime Minister Barre, were Pierre Trudeau of Canada, US Deputy Secretary of State Kenneth Dam and Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Ozal.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the need for leaders to avoid making known their stands before a conference was relevant in the light of efforts to bring about an East-West detente.

He said the arms race and the East-West tension had different implications to the developed and the developing countries.

While the Third World too would suffer from fallout in the event of a nuclear war, developing countries had always been the theatres of war by proxy.

At a Press conference later, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir suggested that the world should not wait for the

settlement of the East-West conflict before resolving the North-South imbalance.

He said of the two issues before the community of nations, the North-South dialogue was far easier to settle and would lead to immediate benefits for the developing as well as the developed countries.

He said the gap between the North and the South was far easier to bridge than solving the tension between the East and the West.

"We must not wait for the East-West conflict to be resolved before embarking on efforts to solve the question of the North-South imbalance," he told reporters when clarifying the differences of opinion between him and Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau on ways of bringing about international peace.

Mr Trudeau in his speech at the plenary session had emphasised the need for an East-West dialogue and that nations should exert pressure on the five big powers to meet on arms limitation.

He said it was in the interest of all nations to see the settlement of the East-West conflict as priority.

Thus, while Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir felt that priority should be given to the settlement on the North-South imbalance, Mr Trudeau saw the need for the East-West conflict to be settled first.