

Friendship is best defence: Mahathir

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. -- The Malaysian defence posture lies in defusing threats and making friends on a mutual footing, not in a show of armed strength, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister cautioned that the consequences of a superpower arms race could doom the world rather than inspire the rivals to find peace.

"WC in Malaysia believe that the first line of defence of any country is not its military capability."

It lay in national resilience and in shaping a strategic environment where threats were minimised.

"It lies in the policy of making friends with those who want to be friends with us," Dr Mahathir told more than 60 international delegates at the Global Community Forum here.

He disagreed with the

idea that peace could only be gained from a position of military might or that stability would only result from a military stand-off.

He found it "disheartening that there are those who still believe that if you want peace, you must prepare for war and that the only guarantee of stability is the creation of balances of military power."

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Where a military superiority could deter enemies in the past, the modern arms race simply produced obsolete defences against increasingly sophisticated weapons of mass destruction.

What was happening now was an increase in tension that rippled across the globe.

"The result (of an arms race) will be an escalation of expenditure on defence and offence that will pull the rest of the world along with them."

"The global community which sounds so good may only mean global destruction if the idea of preparing for war in order to avoid it is carried to its logical conclusion."

He also criticised countries of the North who remained insensitive to the developing South's interests and continued to bully the weaker nations with their stronger economies.

"But these developed nations must surely realise that in the end there will be a price to pay. WC are really interdependent and even the developed must one day bow, to the developing."

Dr Mahathir said that the once-weaker countries had a way of fighting back.

"We saw the results of the exploitation of the oil-producing countries. Sur-

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ely we do not want to see that repeated in other areas even if it be on a lower scale," he said.

Despite the odds, Asean had bucked international economic trends and continued to prosper into "the second most effective regional grouping in the world."

Referring to the topic of the forum — a conference on Southeast Asia and the Pacific Age — the Prime Minister suggested that the path for greater pan-Pacific co-operation could lie in the Asean experience.

Asean's success was rooted in a spirit of partnership rather than born of any grand, design or economic or political blueprints.

"If there is going to be any quantum leap in co-operation between the countries of the Pacific, then the appalling ignorance even among neighbours in the region must be overcome," he said.

"It follows that if the Pacific Rim countries are interested in some form of association, a grand economic design should be the last thing

that they should think of."

The Prime Minister's vision of a Pacific combine begins with contacts and exchanges that would grow into "a sense of community... that will make mutual help and co-operation almost second nature".

At this stage, the Pacific Rim countries were far too diverse and too unfamiliar to each other to come together into a Pacific Community, he said.

"But this does not mean that there isn't or there will not be a Pacific Age. The fact is that for very different reasons each and every Pacific country has exhibited vigorous growth in the past twenty years."

Of more immediate concern, however, was Indochina which remained left out of the economic dynamism of the rest of Southeast Asia.

The "immediate effect" of the Indochinese "futile war of conquest... is to make the ambitious conqueror itself a client State and a vassal of a foreign power," Dr Mahathir said.