

We have been let down by the Commonwealth, says Mahathir

Our bitter lesson: PM

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Malaysia has come to the bitter realisation that it will have to fight for itself after having been betrayed by lofty sentiments and the high ideals of international friendship, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

Declaring Malaysia's extreme disaffection with the Commonwealth, the Prime Minister called it a "creature of the past" that had once lulled the country into a mistaken belief of the selflessness among nations.

Speaking at a dinner in honour of British Prime Minister Mrs Margaret Thatcher, he said:

By KAMRUL IDRIS

"Malaysians are by nature sentimental and they value friendship and common history even though some episodes may not be palatable to them.

"But almost 28 years of independence have also taught Malaysians a great deal. The lesson that they have been forced to take to heart is that the world really cares very little for sentiments.

"Over and over again this lesson has been hammered into our heads."

Hypocrisy

Dr Mahathir implied that the paternal concern expressed by the world powers to the less-developed countries belied an overriding priority of national self-interest.

"Even now we are being taught that sentiments, friendship, past associa-

tions and the rest have very little to do with the relationship between nations or groups of nations."

He censured the decadence of the Commonwealth and its underlying hypocrisy. He said Malaysia had been let down by the bloc of States in the former British Empire and that its interest in it had almost dissipated.

"The word Commonwealth implies a certain sharing of wealth between members. We took it quite literally at first.

"But we have since found out that the Commonwealth has nothing to do with wealth commonly owned."

He said an inverse order of importance existed between rich and poor nations, with the poor as neglected as they would be on their own.

"The fact that the poor cannot pay as much has nothing whatsoever to do with the wealth available in the Commonwealth.

"Malaysia had not decided to cease its membership although it "relegated the Commonwealth to fourth place in order of priority in its foreign relations.

"I am not saying this as an appeal to resuscitate the Commonwealth and its ideal. The Commonwealth as originally conceived is a creature of the past."

The Prime Minister referred to the "hitches and glitches" in Malaysia's relations with Britain and hinted that it would not attempt to extract sympathy in order to get what it wanted.

"We have the usual ma-

chinery for negotiations and Malaysia will not resurrect past associations in order to influence the results of any negotiations."

Malaysia must be pragmatic, possess tenacity and singleness of purpose, he said. With these qualities it should ignore external criticism.

"We live in a pragmatic and rather calculating world and Malaysians, like everyone else, must appreciate and apply pragmatism if they are to prosper or, at least, to survive.

"We will not be deterred by adverse criticisms of our in-

ustriansation programme or of our political system or of our economic policies.

"In the final analysis it is the hard-headed executive who make the decisions, not the self-appointed experts."

Despite the bad Press "there is no dearth of foreign entrepreneurs to invest or bankers to lend. Indeed the banks are forever asking us to borrow.

"There are not too many good borrowers these days.

"We do not want to be obliged to anyone. What we do for ourselves, including the cultivation of friends, will in the final analysis be in the interest of our nation."

Dr Mahathir listed Malaysia's concern in its ties with London, chief among which was the trade imbalance, especially in invisibles.

Justice

He appreciated Britain's support for ASEAN's position on Kampuchea and joined in a condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

He expressed support for the Palestinians and blamed the "biased view of the West" for having "made it an intractable problem".

"The West should understand that justice and fair play would do more for peace than the desire to atone for past anti-Semitism."

He cautioned against the continuing nuclear arms race and reiterated the Malaysian lobby to open up the continent of Antarctica to all nations.