

# Commonwealth: Time to face the realities

5 18 OCT 1985

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad gave leaders of Commonwealth countries a jolt when he spoke his mind on the past and future of the organisation and the problems bedeviling the world at the opening of CHOGM on Wednesday. Pulling no punches, the Prime Minister stated in clear terms Malaysia's stand on the Commonwealth, apartheid, the Namibia issue and the world economy.

Admitting that he had a jaundiced view of the Commonwealth, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the organisation today was different from what it was when it started and had failed to live up to its expectations. Below is the full text of Dr Mahathir's speech.

I MUST confess my pleasure at being here in this enchanting Caribbean paradise. The Commonwealth has done well to choose the Bahamas for this conference. On behalf of the Malaysian delegation I would like to thank the Government of the Bahamas for the hospitality and courtesy extended to us.

I cannot help but be soothed by the environment and the gracious hospitality, despite my jaundice view of the Commonwealth. However, the agenda that the Commonwealth Secretary-General has prepared for us, and the international scene forces us to face the realities. And the realities are quite different from what we see in this paradise on earth.

I shall try to be brief and to the point. First the Commonwealth. It is not what it was when it started. It is no longer a club for nations founded by migrants from Europe. It is now a collec-

tion of former colonies who have been persuaded to join the Commonwealth through oblique hints that they will benefit from it.

In the event they have found the Commonwealth failing to live up to the promise. If the Commonwealth is to be perpetuated, the Commonwealth must achieve tangible and meaningful results for its members. It must give some substance to the term "common wealth," particularly for the poorer members.

Malaysia's experience of the Commonwealth has not endeared the organisation to it. Indeed the goodwill that we had when we first joined it has been worn thin with the passage of events and time.

We have nothing against the majority of the members with whom we have good bilateral relations, anyway. But I would say that good, bad, or indifferent, the relations would

have been there whether there is a Commonwealth or not.

The only episode that we appreciate about the Commonwealth is when it expelled and made a pariah of South Africa. I shall say a few more things about that later, as it is the most im-

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portant reason, in our view, for this present meeting of the Commonwealth.

However, I would like to take this opportunity to talk about a few of the problems that face the world today, particularly their effect on developing countries like Malaysia.

The concept of justice

and fairplay has changed considerably. The most important determinant of international behaviour now is strength — economic strength, political strength and, of course, military strength.

We see today powerful countries actually applaud-

ing the hideous behaviour of countries like Israel. We do not approve of international terrorism by individuals or organisations, whatever the reasons. But for any rational administration to approve of terrorism by the governments of countries is to desert completely international morality.

We see the economies of poor countries destroyed by the economic policies of the rich and the powerful. We see the influential countries exerting pressure on their client states to reject legitimate claims such as that on Antarctica. And, of course, we see powerful nations physically occupying neighbouring countries in order, they claim, to protect themselves.

The weak has to meekly submit to all these because they have no choice. Gunboat diplomacy is not dead. It has taken a more frightening dimension. This is the world that small developing countries have to struggle in, to survive.

They can come together, to seek security in numbers. But the cavalier fashion with which even the United Nations has been dismissed by the rich and the powerful has proven the

naivete of that assumption.

Malaysia lives by trade. So too do most of the developing countries. We can only produce primary products which we hope to trade for the manufactured goods we need. But for the past few years the price of primary products have plummeted.

Nothing fetches a fair price anymore. Indeed, frequently the prices are lower than the cost of production. Why is this so? In the first place developed countries go into competing primary products which they subsidise and produce in excess.

Then they fix the price through commodity exchanges in their countries with membership confined to themselves. If their members look like losing money, then they change the rules. They even start rumours in order to influence prices and the western Press aids and abets them.

But not so the manufactured goods that they market in the poor developing countries. They are no exchanges for manufactured goods. The price is determined by the manufacturers themselves. And whether the raw material

markets soon put paid to that. Even when they try to go to other developing countries, they find that they cannot compete against the credit terms and the political and economic leverage exerted by the rich developed countries.

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prices go up or down, the price of manufactured goods always go up. And so more and more commodities have to be sold by poor countries in order to buy less and less manufactured goods.

Some developing countries try to industrialise and export their products. But protectionism in the richest

Much of the economic ills of the world today is man-made. And it is not entirely made in the oil producing countries. It is the financial mismanagement of the developed countries, their massive expenditure on arms, their protectionist policies, their wasteful over-production of various commodities, their trading

practices that has brought the world to the present economic depression.

And as the economic problems are man-made, they will have to be unmade by man. We know precisely how the economy of the world can be restored but unless and until the economic giants of the world are willing to act, nothing that the developing countries can do will be of any avail. The price of oil is low now and so are the prices of every commodity. But whatever good they may do is negated by the developed countries.

And now back to South Africa. There is no Government like the regime in South Africa. It is a total *pariah*. It legalises the morally illegal. Minority is majority. Slavery is freedom. Ghettos are nations.

Like Israel, they respect no international norms. Boundaries are not sacred to the racists of South Africa.

And this white racist regime survives in this day and age. And why does it survive? It survives because the people who are fond of criticising alleged racism in developing countries are not prepared to do anything about the most blatantly racist regime in the world.

Malaysia does not trade with South Africa. We deprive ourselves of substantial revenue by so doing. But those whose application of sanctions are likely to bring South Africa to its knees, have any number of arrangements why they should not apply sanctions.

Restrictions on imports from poor countries, restrictions which cause real human sufferings in these small states are alright. But not sanctions against South Africa. The blacks would suffer. That is the excuse.

The fact is that the blacks are already suffering. Cures are always painful. As a doctor I should know. But to perpetuate sufferings is a poor alternative to the temporary pain of a cure. If sanctions can help destroy a despicable policy like apartheid, then sanctions must be applied and they must be applied by those who can hurt most; by the countries with the biggest economic clout.

Failure to do so would mean hypocrisy on the part of these countries. And that will rub off on the Commonwealth.

Finally, a word about Namibia. It is bad enough for a despicable regime like that of South Africa to remain trustee of this unfortunate country, but now the Namibians are being punished for an alleged crime committed by another country. Why should Namibia remain subjugated simply because Cuban troops are in Angola?

These are some of the problems that face the world today. If the Commonwealth conference is not going to be a respite for us from the problems at home, it will have to do something about these problems. It should at least agree on what could be done about South Africa. It should help positively to restore the economy of the world. It should attempt to remove all kinds of racial and colour discriminations.

If the Commonwealth refuses to do something definite, then the club should cease to pretend. It should admit that it really cannot contribute towards solving the problems faced by its members, if not the world. Then we can relax and enjoy our get together.