

South acts to chart future

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today accepted the chairmanship of a steering group to prepare the groundwork for the establishment of the independent Commission of the South on development issues.

Announcing this when chairing the concluding session of the four-day Second South-South Summit here, the Prime Minister said he hoped to submit a report by the time the heads of Governments of the Non-Aligned Movement meet in Harare, Zimbabwe, on Sept. 2.

He described the proposed formation of the commission as the most important decision taken by the conference.

He said the steering group would "try to finish the work as quickly as possible."

"We want to be practical and we are not interested in apportioning blame to people and instead concentrate on what we can and will do in order to overcome the problems that are faced by the countries of the South," he added.

The conference came out with a document known as the Kuala Lumpur Statement which stressed the necessity and urgency for the South to reappraise its position and chart out a path for the future.

Speaking at a Press conference later, the Prime Minister said that while the Tokyo summit had stated that the world economy was picking up, the tone of the South was different.

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He said the South did not think that the world economy was doing that well.

"In fact, everyone agrees that we are facing an economic crisis which requires action to be taken in order to alleviate the situation," he added.

In doing so, Dr Mahathir said the South had to be practical and clear about the things that they wanted to do on very specific issues.

Despite the South facing problems in differences of ideology, he said there were some common problems, and to address these problems, particularly in overcoming the depressed prices of commodities, which most countries in

the South were dependent on, a strategy had to be mapped out.

"The commission will come out with practical solutions and not be involved in rhetorics," he said.

The Prime Minister said the steering committee would set out the terms of reference and the objectives and suggest the appointment of members of the commission, limited to no more than 20.

"They (the commission members) will then work on the guidelines prepared by the steering committee," he said.

"We have a fair idea of those to sit in the steering committee, which will also have the services of the London-based Third World Foundation," he said.

The Prime Minister stressed that members of the commission would be individuals not representing any Government and that "we would like to keep that at that level."

He said the committee would seek the support of as many Governments as possible.

He was confident that some Governments would definitely contribute to the commission's funds, adding that contribution from Malaysia would come from the Government.

Asked now the commission could influence Governments to implement its recommendations since other programmes adopted by the Group of 77 and the Non-Aligned Movement had to a certain extent failed to be implemented, Dr Mahathir said:

"We will concentrate on possible things that we can do even if it means confining ourselves to only a few countries," he said.

He added that to get some 130 countries to agree to the programmes that might compete with national and ideological interests, "then we are not going to get anywhere."

On relations between the South and the North, Dr Mahathir said the South would not like to have confrontation with the North as this was non-productive.

"We should work with people who are willing to work with us," adding that "there are people in

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the North who are willing to work with us."

He said it was unfortunate that it was the "most powerful people" who felt that there was no necessity to work with the South or to take into consideration the problems of the South.

"But there are people who are sympathetic towards us and I am sure they can contribute in some way or maybe influence the thinking in the North because, in the final analysis, we are interdependent.

"Like it or not, the South will still have to trade with the North. So it is good to have friendly people up there in the North and we should cultivate them," he said.

Asked whether the commission would consider holding a renewed dialogue with the North, the Prime Minister said it would definitely consider this.

He declined to state the countries in the North that were not sympathetic to the South, but said in reply to a question that "it did not sound like the seven countries which met in Tokyo are very concerned about us, they did not even invite us as observers or something like that."

The Prime Minister also said that Asean would like to have more co-operation with the different regional groupings in the South.

To illustrate the lack of co-operation among South countries, Dr Mahathir cited the need for the delegates to the conference to go to an airport in the North before reaching here, adding that the same applied to Malaysians wanting to go to Africa and Latin America.

He said "we will have to find a way of establishing our own direct linkages not only in terms of travel but also economic co-operation."