

Mahathir prompts some soul searching

MSF - 4 SEP 1986

HARARE, Wed. — There was some soul searching at the eighth Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit today when Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that many member states have become partisan and biased in dealing with world problems. Oversea Trips

Without mincing his words, the Prime Minister said: "We condemn a breach of international behaviour because of a certain principle, but when the same breach is perpetrated by those we are inclined to be friendly with, we lower our voices or become totally mute."

"The principle we uphold seems flexible. That others do it too, the powers in the north, is no excuse. They have brute strength. We depend on moral suasion."

"Some condemn international agreements for some commodities and refuse to cooperate to stabilise prices while with other commodities that they produce and export they form cartels alongside developed countries."

"In disarray, our moral authority and our voices become muted and ineffective."

Dr Mahathir was addressing the plenary session of the summit. He was saying in effect that there should not be double standards.

Extending this observation to foreign military intervention, he called upon NAM to take a united stand and condemn it as a matter of principle.

He said Malaysia condemned all attempts to instal puppet regimes as an instrument of hegemony, whether they are in Asia, in Africa, in Europe or in Central America.

Naturally, it is more concerned

when this happens close to it. More so, too, when it can escalate into a direct threat.

It believes that the affairs in a country are not for foreign nations to direct.

"We may not like the regime found in a neighbouring country."

"We may condemn the regime for cruelty or lack of justice or transgression of human rights. But we have no right to send our troops in to instal a government to our liking."

Malaysia therefore condemns such action and reserves the right to support the ousted legitimate governments politically in their attempts to regain control of their countries.

Dr Mahathir feels that NAM should have a united stand on this.

Whether the aggression is perpetrated by the big powers or by a member state, NAM should condemn it as a matter of principle.

Only by doing so can NAM gain credibility and moral force as a group of Non-Aligned nations.

Amidst the gungho rhetoric at the summit, Dr Mahathir also brought realities back into sharp focus when he said that independent Third World countries are not really free from their former colonial bosses.

"All of us now claim to be masters of our own fate and fortune," he said.

"If eloquence is the yardstick, our voices ring out loud and clear that we are free. But let us not delude ourselves."

"While we are legally free, the process of economic and political emasculation has rendered that freedom less than real."

"The developing countries can-

not act freely because they have been so progressively emasculated that they will collapse if they are deprived of the crutches of economic, military and political aids from their former imperial masters.

"They have no control over their sources of income and sometimes even over their relationship with neighbours and distant lands."

"Sometimes they are made proxies in the wars of other people, pawns in the international games and battle grounds for live testing of weapons."

"They came together and conceived the new international economic order."

"Now, 14 years after the enunciation of the concept of that order, they are still overwhelmed by unbearable external debts, straight jacketed by protectionism and beggared by volatile interest and exchange rates."

"How free are they? How unaligned are we?"

Dr Mahathir said freedom needs to be quantified as much as it has to be nurtured. It has to be managed like an institution.

"On our own, singly, barring a few giants among us, we are quite helpless," he said.

"Our strength and our ability to act lies in our collective will and voice."

"In concept and on well prepared grounds, the voice of this movement spanning Latin America, Africa, and Asia and a part of Europe will resound strong and powerful."

"It will then take on the quality of a moral force tied to principles that we committed ourselves to 25 years ago." — By LIM TOW BOON