

Work together, PM tells South

By VONG NYAM MING

DEVELOPING countries should forget about forming more organisations among themselves to struggle against inequalities which separate the South from rich OECD countries in the North.

Instead they should step up South-South cooperation to strengthen each other and still work with the North toward a better world order "however frustrating the effort," Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad counselled yesterday.

"The North is not our intractable enemy. There is little to be gained by an attitude of confrontation. We have to speak the truth, we have to say the obvious. But we will still work with the North toward a better world order. We have friends in the North and we must strive to work with them however frustrating the effort," he said.

Opening the South II conference in Kuala Lumpur, Dr Mahathir pointed out that there are already many organisations involving the developing countries.

"We already have the

Non-Aligned Movement, largely an organisation of the South. We have the Group of 77, also a grouping of the South. We have the Organisation of Islamic Conference or OIC, the OAS (Organisation of American States) and others.

"We do not need an-

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other organisation. All we really need is the recognition that unless we help strengthen each other, we are not going to be in a position singly, or in a group, to get fair treatment from the North.

"The North believes in strength. They deal differently with the strong and the weak... but too many countries with too many different interests just cannot unite.

"We have to recognise this and do the next best thing. We can cooperate bilaterally or regionally so long as our partners are from the South," he added.

Dr Mahathir spoke critically of the dismal performance of the South

and described the New International Economic Order (NIEO) as a non-starter.

The commodity agreements which countries of the South put so much faith in have "never really worked, despite the prohibitive cost," he added.

"Our collective performance has been dismal... and as we turn our sights to the forthcoming Non-Aligned summit in Zimbabwe, we should be prepared to admit that the Delhi declaration on collective self-reliance amounted to no more than a paper pledge," he told prominent scholars and statesmen from 33 Third World countries who are attending the conference.

Criticising the North for practising double standards, he said: "They say the laws of supply and demand, the market place, must prevail. We must not meddle with it through policy decisions.

"Yet how does a poor country compete when

conditions are placed on aid, conditions not to buy from other sources, not to set up industries of a certain kind? How do poor countries compete with the rich? How do we counter the practice of dumping excess goods at below cost.

"The recent massive glut has dealt a death blow to commodity agreements. We, the producers of the South, are more vulnerable than ever. We have nothing to fall back on. All the commodities are equally affected. We have no manufactured products to export in place of commodities.

"Not only is the NIEO rejected, the North has responded by closing their ranks and creating their own economic order for the world," he said, referring to the seven-country OECD meeting now in session in Tokyo.

Dr Mahathir said that while commodity agreements have not proven successful, there was a case for cooperation among producers in research and development, and the pooling of information.