

Best way out for Third World

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. —
The Prime Minister today touched on home truths facing Third World countries and urged them to make the best of a bad situation.

It would entail meaningful and practical co-operation.

"South-South co-operation will enable us to cushion ourselves against the arbitrary actions and decisions of a handful of nations," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said at the opening of the second South-South summit.

Expounding the merits of such co-

By BALAN MOSES

operation at a time of severe adversity, he called for a recognition of realities.

"It would be wonderful if all the hundred over countries of the South can stand united and co-operate with each other in order to overcome econo-

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mic, political and social problems.

"But the truth is that that scenario can only happen in dreams. Bilateral or group co-operation on the other hand is real and practical."

While noting that Third World coun-

tries could obtain the best results in negotiations with the North if they were strong, he, nevertheless, felt that complete unity among their ranks was unattainable.

"Of course, it would be good if we unite. 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 co-operate bilaterally or regionally, so long as our partners are from the South."

Dealings with bilateral co-operation should be seen as the key to greater economic, political and social advancement among Third World nations.

The establishment of an independent commission on South-South co-operation could represent a tangible effort towards closer links among nations in the grouping.

The Prime Minister suggested that the commission, which could have a limited lifespan, be entrusted with the task of reporting to the Group of 77 (G77) on specific proposals for practical South-South co-operation.

On avenues for greater bilateral co-operation, he called for efforts in the field of research and development of primary commodities, education, culture and dissemination of news.

Close harmonisation of the South-South programmes of the Non-Aligned Movement and G77 should also be carried out. The Caracas Programme of Action

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should also be made the centre of efforts for economic co-operation.

One area of the programme which held promise was efforts to establish a General System of Trade Preferences.

He regretted that some of their past efforts towards self-reliance had proved unfruitful. This had not helped improve their standing with the nations of the North.

Citing the example of the declaration on collective self-reliance adopted at the Non-Aligned Summit in New Delhi in 1983, he said it had turned out to be "no more than a paper pledge".

Another example of non-productive efforts was the Caracas Programme of Action adopted at the Group of 77 meeting in 1981. "Unfortunately no tangible benefits have been derived by member States from this programme."

Nations of the South should recognise the need to strengthen each other. Failure to do so would render their individual or collective efforts to obtain more fair treatment from the North meaningless.

Touching on the woes of Third World countries, the Prime Minister highlighted the following:

- Collapse of commodity prices;
- Worsening terms of trade;
- Rising indebtedness;
- Depreciation of currencies against those of some of the advanced nations; and,
- Protectionist policies of the North.

Describing the challenges posed by the North as a "broad-based and multi-directional attack", he said the situation in Third World countries had been rendered deplorable.

However, this should not make these nations lose heart. "Before we can make it any better, we must prevent it from getting worse."

Dr Mahathir urged the delegates to the conference to galvanise their efforts towards concrete proposals and targets. "Let our work be meaningful and let us demonstrate our sense of purpose."

About 120 Third World statesmen and scholars are attending the four-day conference, which is jointly organised by the Institute of International and Strategic Studies (ISIS) and the Third World Foundation for Social and Economic Studies.