

PM: NEED FOR RADICAL CHANGE IN C'WEALTH

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KUALA LUMPUR Tues. — There must be a "radical change" in attitude among some Commonwealth member countries if the organisation is to survive and remain meaningful, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Alternatively, the Prime Minister said, the Commonwealth should be declared a "social club of English-speaking ex-colonies."

"The Commonwealth should not be just a comfortable old boys club. The founder members must exhibit their belief in its *raison d'etre* by not forsaking the Commonwealth whenever it becomes embarrassing or it obstructs their economic interest.

"If they do this, they cannot really expect the new members to go on subscribing to the ideals and spirit of the Commonwealth," he said when opening the meeting of Commonwealth Speakers and Presiding Officers Standing Committee at Parliament House.

Dr Mahathir said that it was the disillusionment caused by the actions of senior Commonwealth members that has prompted Malaysia to institute a very careful study of the Commonwealth and its membership in the organisation.

"From where we are, we see the Commonwealth having everything except wealth that is common to all its members.

"The wealth is, in fact, confined to a very few of us. We need not go into history and recriminate.

"But is there any reason why we cannot help those of us who are in dire need?

Should we ignore their cries for help simply because economic considerations demand that we help the oppressor against the oppressed?

"Should we forsake them because we have found new friends and formed new associations?" he said.

Last July, Malaysia was the first member country outside the African continent to boycott the Commonwealth Games in Edin-

burgh in protest against Britain's reluctance to impose economic sanctions on the South African regime for its apartheid policy.

Following that, Dr Mahathir announced last September that the Government would study in detail the Commonwealth to ascertain the benefits of being a member.

Malaysia plays host to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) conference this August.

Dr Mahathir said: "It (referring to Malaysia playing host) should not be taken as a measure of our commitment to the Commonwealth concept.

"We maintain an open mind while we do our assessment of the Commonwealth.

"Nevertheless, we pray and hope that we will be convinced that the Commonwealth amounts to something — that wealth

should indeed be shared and common.

"We are not asking for redistribution of the spoils. But we do ask that no one take unjustified negative steps which will impoverish further the already poor."

The Prime Minister pointed out that the changed world scenario today demands that the Commonwealth adjusts itself to this new environment.

Dr Mahathir said the inability to do so might result

in the Commonwealth losing more of its credibility and effectiveness as an organisation set up with noble virtuous objectives.

He said generally, what was insisted upon by the rich and powerful as the "norms" for international behaviour and relations and adhered to by small and weak countries, have constantly been violated by the strong as soon as the weak learns to benefit from these "norms."

These "self-righteous" countries condemn discrimination in other countries but they themselves practised the most blatant discrimination, he said.

"They demand rights for minorities and races in other countries which they are not prepared to give to similar minorities in their own.

"And they continuously instigate and encourage protest and disorder which they are not prepared to tolerate in their own countries," he said.

The Prime Minister said one could not help but conclude that the industrialised countries were deliberately denying the developing nations equitable participation on the world's trade.

"The Commonwealth may symbolise the end of political imperialism but there is reason to believe that the old imperialist nations have found a substitute in economic imperialism," Dr Mahathir added.

The week-long meeting is attended by Speakers, Deputy Speakers and Presiding Officers of Commonwealth countries including Britain, Australia, the Bahamas, Canada, India, Malawi and Zimbabwe.