

# PM TO RICH NATIONS: BE MORE RESPONSIBLE

By GOH SAY ENG

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, saying that "the poor want to breathe fresh, unpolluted air as much as anyone else," called for more responsibility on the part of developed nations in their approach to world trade.

"It is important not to take away with one hand what the other hand gives. What we are seeing today is near total disregard for the poor," the Prime Minister said today.

"Seven rich countries meet and make decisions in their favour without any regard for the rest of the world ... the fall in commodity prices, restrictive trade practices by the rich, unfair competition by the technologically superior, control of the means of transport, the sponge-like soaking of capital by the rich ... have all combined to make the poor even poorer."

The Prime Minister was delivering the keynote address on the opening day of the fifth session of the Interaction Council.

The council, of which former Japanese Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda is honorary chairman, is an independent international organisation of former heads of government to promote action on issues central to world peace and development.

Dr Mahathir said the poor wanted to live in an environment that was naturally clean and beautiful.

"But the problem is affordability. Environment costs. For most developing countries, the problem of environment is academic.

More important is development. Aid is important. Soft loans are welcome," he said.

He said Malaysia was also concerned about environment.

"But environment costs. There will be no pollution from palm oil factories if the factories can afford to pay for pollution-control equipment.

"But when palm oil prices are forced down by subsidised production of competing oils, environment and pollution become secondary to the more pressing needs of earning minimal profits," he said.

On aid, he said no country wanted to live on aid forever.

"Every country wants to

earn money for itself. This it can do only if there are no trade restrictions. The incentives offered by developing countries for export manufacturing can only be worthwhile if the developed countries open their markets."

Dr Mahathir said the trade wars of the rich should not result in blanket restrictions which affect developing countries.

"Restrictions should be discriminating in favour of developing countries," he said.

He added that the decision by the rich nations to overcome their trade imbalances by revaluing various international currencies had severely affected developing countries.

"This is what happens when the rich become inward-looking. Multi-lateralism is left battered, condemned to a slow death through fund deprivation. And the poor pay the price even as they get poorer.

"We have yet to learn to accept the fact that we are interdependent. There are some who think that they can be rich in the midst of poverty. History has taught us little. It is almost as if someone is again saying 'If you have no bread, why not eat cake,'" he said.

Dr Mahathir told the council members: "You are the conscience of the world. We welcome you because we think the world needs its conscience now more than ever."