

CLOSE RANKS, PM URGES

Call to Asean

By SHARIF HARON

ASEAN should strive for greater intra-Asean cooperation in industry and trade in the light of present unfair international trade practices, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

This will make Asean countries less dependent on markets outside their control, he said when opening the ninth general assembly of the Asean Inter-Parliamentary Organisation (Aipo) in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"Asean countries are dependent on external markets for exports of their commodities, and increasingly, of their manufactured goods. However, the unfavourable global trading conditions, compounded by the protectionist trends in the developed countries have created difficulties for all developing countries, including Asean.

"With this unhealthy environment it is even more necessary that Asean achieve greater intra-Asean cooperation in industry

and trade," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said.

In this respect, the Prime Minister said parliamentarians have a role to play.

"While it is the executive's responsibility to come up with suggestions on policies and their modus operandi, the parliamentarians are equally responsible for finding ways to overcome our national and regional problems.

"Parliamentarians are particularly well-placed to reject legislative measures which will reduce intra-regional and world trade," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said Asean's solidarity and economic achievements have had the continuing attention and efforts of the respective foreign and economic ministers.

But, he added, Asean also owes a great deal to the roots of understanding, goodwill and cooperation that have been put down by

other governmental, non-governmental and people's institutions across the region.

He said Aipo, as a forum for Asean parliamentarians, has also played its part in developing a common framework of approaches and actions on various issues.

The Prime Minister said South-East Asia remains an area of

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strategic importance in the emerging era of the Pacific in which the major powers would no doubt continue to have a significant role in determining the region's future directions.

However, he added, it is the primary responsibility of the nations of the region to ensure a conflict-free South-East Asia through

closer cooperation in the political, economic, social and cultural fields among themselves, as well as with other interested parties.

He said the political, economic and social interests of Asean member countries, though diverse, are inextricably intertwined.

"The increasing strategic and economic importance of Asean and South-East Asia in general, and the continuing uncertainty in Indochina makes it more imperative for the South-East Asian region to accelerate development and progress and to maintain durable peace and stability.

Touching on democracy, the Prime Minister said Asean countries have succeeded in mastering the intricacies of democracy; and to develop rapidly at the same time is very satisfying.

But Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said Asean countries should not float over the successes, nor

should they rest satisfied. There is still much to be done to develop the countries, and for development to take place, there has to be stability.

"Members of Parliament must know this, and they must contribute towards stability. Those who undermine stability in the pursuit of dubious democratic rights; those who ignore the well-being of the majority cannot be considered as having the interest of their country or even of democracy at heart.

"It is for this reason that communists and extremists are not allowed to use democratic processes to destroy democracy," the Prime Minister said.

On the plight of the Palestinians, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said Malaysia strongly and emphatically condemns the Tel Aviv regime for its cruelties and calls on it to immediately abide by international norms and practices.

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