

PM: Prospects good for region

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NEW YORK, Fri. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in an overview of regional and international co-operation in the coming years, said South-East Asia will manage the transition to the 1990s successfully.

The Prime Minister said the region will experience prosperity as it moves towards an exciting and challenging period which offers many opportunities to surge ahead into the 21st century.

Dr Mahathir said: "We in Malaysia fully subscribe to the belief the Pacific region will displace the Atlantic as the economic powerhouse of the future. America is fortunate in being both an Atlantic as well as a Pacific country.

"So there will be no regression for you.

"But for the countries of the Pacific West there are exciting times ahead. Already four countries in the region have gained the status of newly in-

dustrialised country. Others are obviously hot on their heels.

"Much will depend on their access to the markets of America and Europe. But as they prosper, they will become good markets for their own goods too. Then prosperity will have a more sound base in the form of mutually supportive intra-regional markets.

"It will take time, but it will happen," the Prime Minister said in a breakfast meeting with the Council on Foreign Relations here today.

Articulating a Malaysian perspective on "The Challenges Ahead for Regional and International Co-operation," Dr Mahathir said the 80s began with much pessimism and gloom.

Detente and international political co-operation seemed a phenomena of the past. Invading armies were already

entrenched in Afghanistan and Kampuchea. In both countries, the situation was seemingly irreversible. Relations between the superpowers were openly antagonistic.

On the economic front, trade tensions were on the rise within the free trading system. He said the inability of the industrial democracies to forge workable and practical solutions had serious consequences for developing countries.

The yen appreciation, falling commodity prices, increasing protectionism and unmanageable debt burden threatened to plunge the global economy into total anarchy.

But the Prime Minister said the mood of pessimism appeared to be lifting, at least politically. Perestroika and glasnost from the Soviet Union has yielded positive changes

within the Soviet territory and in the international arena.

The declared withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan and Vietnam's willingness to discuss withdrawal from Kampuchea appears to lend further credence to the possibilities of peace.

In both cases, it will be a triumph for sanity in international relations.

"Interventionism, as a tool of state policy for extending control and influence has now been discredited," Dr Mahathir said.

This will have a sobering effect on other would-be aggressors and will be conducive to greater respect for the principles of the United Nations charter, he added.

The Prime Minister believed that these developments will continue to have a positive impact on other unresolved conflicts such as the Iran-Iraq war, the Palestinian issue and Southern Africa.

He said the process can be hastened if China is brought into the discussion either formally or informally. The world is entering a tripolar dimension and China's new-found armaments must be included in any considerations.

Dr Mahathir predicted "a new era" for South-East Asia as soon as peace returns to the region and the last barriers against regional co-operation are removed. — AHMAD A. TALIB