

# When Vietnam can join Asean — Dr M

SINGAPORE, Thurs. — Vietnam can be admitted into Asean if it subscribes to the grouping's desire for peace and prosperity in the region, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

The system of Government it practises should not hinder its admission, he told a TV forum on *Asean and challenges ahead* aired by the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation at 9.30pm.

The panel, chaired by Prof K. Sandhu of the Institute of South-East Asian Studies, comprised Chan Seng Chee of the Singapore Institute of Policy Studies, *Straits Times* assistant editor Patrick Daniel, and Asian editor of the *International Herald Tribune* Michael Richardson.

Dr Mahathir said the important thing was for Vietnam to "subscribe to ideas that one should not resolve any conflict through war", adding that this was sufficient for Asean.

Last night, during question time after his Singapore lecture, the Prime Minister was also asked on his views on Vietnam vis-a-vis Asean.

He replied that Vietnamese leaders were thinking of joining Asean in the future. "They are thinking of

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joining Asean because the regional grouping has succeeded where they had not.

"Conquering others has not done a country great. What is important is improving the lot of the people." In this respect, Dr Mahathir told the TV forum that Malaysia was willing to help Vietnam.

The aid offer included the rehabilitation of its rubber estates in which Malaysia has the expertise and also in State administration.

Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea disrupted the overtures.

Dr Mahathir said Asean must cultivate not only Vietnam but also Kampuchea and Laos so that "we can help each other".

The panelist asked Dr Mahathir for his views on wide-ranging topics which included

his perspective of Asean relationship with other developed and developing countries, individually and as a group, happenings in the North and South and economic developments in the European Community, US and the Soviet Union.

Closer home, the topics were Islam and the New Economic Policy (NEP).

On the NEP, Dr Mahathir explained the rationale behind the policy stressing that it is essential as long as one race has to compete with another on unequal terms.

He said one should not be sidetracked by the so-called "bumiputeraism" but look at the overall objective of eradicating poverty.

Dr Mahathir ended the 40-minute forum with an emphatic "I see a bright future for Asean".

After his hour-long address at

the Singapore lecture series, Dr Mahathir drew rounds of applause with his frank reply and wit.

Dr Mahathir answered queries on a wide range of subjects including Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto, Soviet leader Gorbachev, Japan and US president-elect George Bush.

He was also asked on Islamic fundamentalism in Malaysia. He made it clear that fundamentalism was different from extremism.

Describing himself as a fundamentalist, he said fundamentalists abided by the teachings of Islam.

However, extremists had their own interpretation of the religion. He said they are not the power that many people think they are and that they are probably influenced by events in Iran.