

PM's hard-hitting speech at Belgrade

From K. Bala

BELGRADE, Tues. — The hard-hitting speech by Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad has been described as the most refreshing and innovative opening day address at the Non-Aligned Meeting (NAM) here.

The Prime Minister covered wide ranging issues facing Third World countries and relations with the big powers, taking into consideration that East and West are no longer distinctly divided.

In his 30-minute speech delivered at 10pm Malaysian time (4pm local time) the message was not only aimed at the 101 other NAM members but also at developed countries.

Delegates and observers to this meeting said Malaysia's views on various political and economic matters would be heard by non-members, especially the developed nations.

For example, Dr Mahathir's view that the only real solution to the debt crisis was to write off the whole or "very nearly the whole of the debts owing", would carry weight.

Though Malaysia is a recipient of loans, it has been paying them. Had the suggestion come from the lender of one of the badly hit debtor nation in Africa or in Latin-America, this would have been viewed as an easy way to get out of

the situation.

Dr Mahathir's suggestion follows the ineffectiveness of the Brady plan which calls for up to 30 per cent writing off of the debts.

"We are paying our debts and we understand the problem well. The proposal is on behalf of the countries that have been severely hit by the debt crisis," said a member of the Malaysian delegation led by Dr Mahathir.

The Prime Minister had reasoned that many poor countries could never repay without surrendering their independence.

Moreover, the fault is not entirely that of the borrower as the lender has to

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pay for his indiscretion.

His hard-hitting reference to the environment issue is because the matter is being used as a trade weapon by certain developing countries who seem to think that only they are interested in the environment and ignoring the equal concern shared by other developing nations.

For example, certain lending institutions are insisting that say 10 per cent of the loan be set aside for dealing with environment problems.

This means that the receiver has no values and

this type of imposition of their values on others should stop.

If the loans for a project is for US\$100 million, the recipient country has to set aside US\$10 million to deal with environment problems.

"Anyway why can't they give US\$100 million for the project and another US\$10 million to deal with the environment problem?" asked a source.

Besides this, many so-called environmentalists are just interested in preventing local timber from competing with temperate soft wood.

Another notable point raised by the Prime Minister is the need to ensure that the revitalisation of the United Nations is complete.

He felt that exclusive clubs should not be allowed to take over the role of the UN as the sole instrument in establishing an equitable and just world society.

This view by Malaysia, which is committed to the non-aligned movement, perhaps stems from its new experience as member of the UN security council.

This was evident in the case of dealing with Namibia and the sending of the UN peacekeeping force where only half the proposed forces were sent because of the diminishing commitment by some of the powers that be.