

Commonwealth urged to find answers to 'pressing issues facing the world

Dr Mahathir sets tone for debate

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today opened the 27th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting with a call to member countries to help resolve some of the global political, economic, environmental and drug problems.

"The Commonwealth, if it is to remain relevant, must provide some of the answers," he said.

Dr Mahathir spoke out strongly against apartheid, drug abuse and the discriminatory trade practices adopted by the developed countries, their attitude towards the debt problem faced by the poor nations and their unfair criticism of developing countries regarding the environment.

His views, which set the tone for the meeting, were echoed by four other heads of Government who spoke after him.

They were Zimbabwe's President Robert G. Mugabe, Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister Rabble Namaliu.

Dr Mahathir's 20-minute address, which was preceded by a colourful cultural extravaganza in the Dewan Merdeka of the Putra World Trade Centre, drew rounds of applause from the delegates and invited guests.

Dr Mahathir reiterated Malaysia's long-held stand that apartheid must be eliminated and that the correct signal must be sent to the racist regime in Pretoria.

He said sanctions worked and consequently must be extended. Investments and financial flows to South Africa must be stopped.

Recent developments in southern Africa should not be allowed to obscure the central issue of apartheid.

"We must not allow the racist Pretoria

regime to deflect us. The establishment of a democratic, truly non-racial, unitary and representative Government in South Africa must remain the principal objective of the Commonwealth."

Touching on the world economic scene, Dr Mahathir said the rich countries had apparently ganged up against the poor, arrogated to themselves the right to direct world trade and manipulated currencies to their advantage.

"Subsidies, quotas, tariff and non-tariff barriers by the rich have distorted costs and supplies worldwide," he said.

"Now, environment and human rights are to be used to hamper economic development in the developing countries."

Dr Mahathir lamented that the debt burden of the poor countries — he made a special reference to the African states — was getting heavier. An unacceptably high percentage of their Gross National Product was spent to service debts.

"Making debt-slaves of whole nations is worse than the inhuman practice of debt-slavery in the past. Those who can must pay, but consideration must be given to

  FULL TEXT ON PAGE 14

those who truly cannot."

On the environment, Dr Mahathir said its degradation could no longer be ignored and urgent solutions must be found.

"Unfortunately, many developed countries seem intent on laying the blame for the world's environmental problems on the developing countries.

"Yet by any measure, it is the developed countries which have most assailed our environment. Nuclear testing, excessive use of fossil fuels, private transportation, release of CFC into the atmosphere, massive wastage of paper, toxic chemical disposal; all these and more are the direct result of the life-style of the rich."

He also called for a global approach in tackling the drug problem, saying: "Whole Governments are being threatened, subverted and corrupted by the drug traffickers. Alone, many nations may just go under.

"Only a combined and co-ordinated anti-drug trafficking war by the international community can hope to defeat this evil and prop up Governments against the violent assaults by the merchants of death."