

PM: Beware the economic weapon

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By Zulkifli Talib

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad has expressed optimism over current moves towards peace with-out military force but warned of possible rise in economic conflicts as economics play a big role in the affairs of nations.

The Prime Minister said that although the path to disarmament, armed defence and deterrent at lower levels of lethality and higher levels of sanity was not easy, more nations have found new ways of engaging in "wars and national extension" through economic means by penetrating into markets and causing dependence on one's financial flow and products.

"This form of soft imperialism of using brains rather than brawn is successfully being used by countries like Japan," Dr Mahathir said, adding that Japan had been an exemplary State in one important lesson — that the objectives of a State could be achieved through the use of

economic means to the greater welfare and benefit of both subject and State.

"The foundation of a nation's power is more likely to rest on brains, creativity, energy and talent of its people rather than the size of its population and the extent of its territory," Dr Mahathir said in his key note address at the third Asia-Pacific round table talks here today.

He said that much of the virtue of soft imperialism lies in the fact that the so-called target may aid and abet and welcome one's national extension.

Dr Mahathir, however, warned of a need for caution because soft imperialism could be perverted by the desire for pomp and glory and by the will to dominate and to dictate.

"But conducted in an enlightened and sustainable manner, this soft imperialism promises a wealth of mutual benefit because the interest of the expansionist power is inherently and critically tied to the comprehensive prosperity of

the countries which are its targets," he said.

"If I am right and what we will see in the years ahead are increasing examples of economic expansionism and decreasing attempts at military expansionism, then we can expect much more of the future to be determined by trading States rather than by garrisons and the military States," Dr Mahathir said, adding that this would contribute to the rise of the primacy of economics.

"This is a trend that cannot but come increasingly to the fore as ideological passions are dissipated, as the cold war winds down, as resort to military means is reduced, as the big and the superpowers and the small powers turn increasingly to economic development and social welfare."

Dr Mahathir said two other reasons why economics would play an increasing role in the affairs of nations were the rise of economic conflicts and the fact that the world was likely to be forced to grap-

ple more and more with a host of international economic issues.

He also said that there was a need to eliminate the misconception that smaller States had no role or no significant role to play in regional and global peace.

"I believe that there is no nation that is too small to contribute to peace in the Pacific. Each nation can contribute to peace if it puts its own house in order, develop its national resilience and seeks the dignity and chooses the high ground of independence."

Dr Mahathir said Asean was a good example in that six nations had become a community where there was a structure of understanding and trust, goodwill and active co-operation unprecedented in the history of South-East Asia.

"There were many obstacles in the way, but what we have now firmly established is a *Pax Aseana*, the more remarkable because it is peace without imperial," he said.