

Dr M on NIC conspiracy of the rich seven

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the group of seven rich nations conferred the title NICs on developing countries to prevent them from becoming developed.

He said the term was first used and popularised by the Western media but the group of seven rich countries latched on to the term to put a brake on the 'Johnny come lately'.

Outlining the reasons why Malaysia did not aspire to become an NIC when opening the 10th Malaysian Economic Convention here, he said when the term NIC — Newly Industrialised Countries, or the Newly Industrialised Economies, or the "Little Dragons" and the "Little Tigers" — was first used it was regarded as complimentary and was literally a pat on the back for underdeveloped countries.

"Predictably many countries would like to be so categorised — it is good for the national ego," he said.

But soon these countries had their Generalised System of Preference (GSP) privileges withdrawn, export quotas imposed, currencies revalued upwards and their so-called human rights records scrutinised and invariably found wanting.

Dr Mahathir said the effect was to stunt the growth of these countries by reduc-

ing their competitiveness and access to markets.

He said Malaysia would one day reach the stage of development of the so-called NICs, adding that it could not stop growth just before that.

Dr Mahathir said even before Malaysia reached anywhere near this stage of development, there was nothing to prevent rich countries from "lowering the net and catching us".

He noted that some magazines were already stating that a US\$3,000 (\$8,100) per capita should be the cut-off point instead of the present US\$7,000.

"The question is why should there be this intermediate classification, this categorisation as NIC? When the rich countries were on their way up did anyone call them NICs and then put up obstacles in their way? What right have the rich to arbitrarily take action against any country which is progressing well? Who gave them the mandate? Is there some international law or consensus that the rich are required to enforce?"

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia did not want to be an NIC because "we think there should be no such term", adding that it was going to protest about the unfairness of the categorisation as NIC.