

Dr M: East Europe now a big
drawcard for investments

Asian nations must be united

NOT 20 FEB 1990

(P)

By K. Bala

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Asian countries must collectively take action to harness investments from Western Europe and the United States which are now pre-occupied with developments in Eastern Europe and Soviet Union.

The Prime Minister said it was obvious that economic potentials in Eastern Europe would benefit their Western counterparts and Americans.

"They are going to take advantage of these opportunities and at the same time relegate their relationship with developing countries to the background."

Dr Mahathir was speaking at a five-nation satellite teleconference of five Asian leaders in conjunction with the One-Asia Assembly organised by the Asia Press Foundation in Manila and attended by Asian media practitioners.

The other leaders in the 80-minute link-up were Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan (pre-recorded), President Corazon Aquino of the Philippines, Indian Foreign Minister Inder Gujral and Prime Minister Kang Yang-hoon of South Korea (preceded by a short appearance

by President Roh Tae-woo who spoke in Korean).

They were interviewed by a panel of six journalists (excerpts of interview on P3).

Dr Mahathir later told reporters after the link-up from Angkasapuri that the preoccupation with Eastern Europe was evident from the poor turn-out of senior European Community leaders during the Asean-EC senior ministerial meeting in Kuching last week.

This showed that they were not paying attention to this part of the world.

He said Eastern Europe had abundant cheap labour which would be an added attraction for the West.

Secular State

Earlier at the "satellite summit," the Prime Minister said Asian and developing countries must continue to attract American and Western European attention.

"Quite naturally the Western Europeans and Americans consider developments in Eastern Europe as an opportunity for them.

"They are much closer. Ethnically they are much more related and have greater grasp of the situation there.

"With the preoccupation of what is happening in Eastern Europe they will have to relegate to the background their relationship with countries in other parts of the world."

During the discussions, the Prime Minister was asked for his views on Asia's future, on nu-

clear weapons, and shaping of national policies based on religion.

His forthright replies were greeted with applause from participants of the assembly who watched the proceedings live.

Dr Mahathir said if religion was interpreted correctly "I see no harm for the influence of religion over national policies".

Even in a secular State there is no guarantee that there will be no conflicts.

To a question that this implied that one is not necessarily committed to the value of what is called a civil society in the modern sense, the Prime Minister told the questioner:

"That is your perception and it is basically a Western perception. I believe in the Eastern interpretation of civil responsibility and how we run our society.

"This is the problem we face with interpretation of rights and wrongs based on what Western thinkers say.

"We should not be totally dominated by their thinking. We have our own way of thinking and I don't think we are always wrong."

The reply drew a round of applause from participants of the assembly in Manila. This evoked American veteran journalist Bernard Kalb, who was the moderator, to say that this was the first applause for the discussions.

On democracy, Dr Mahathir said: "We all believe in freedom and democracy although our interpretations are not necessarily the same.

"We must not abuse the freedom we have."