

DR M: TIME FOR ASIAN NATIONS TO JOIN FORCES

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Asian countries need to combine their strength and press for investment and trade opportunities from Western Europe and the United States which are now focussing attention on Eastern Europe, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The prime minister expressed fear that investments and economic assistance might be diverted to newly-liberated Eastern Europe at the expense of developing countries in Asia.

He said if the US and Western Europe were to focus their attention and energies on Eastern Europe, they would not direct their attention here.

"We (in Asia) have to come together and show some combined strength and keep pressing for their attention, investment and trade ... in the long run, they will still have to depend on our resources," Dr Mahathir said during "a teleconference" with foreign journalists via satellite.

Philippine President Corazon Aquino, South Korean Prime Minister Kang Young Hoon and Indian Foreign Minister Inder Gujral also took part in the 90-minute programme, *One Asia Assembly*. The programme, broadcast by Manila's ABS-CBN station and organised by the Asia Press Foundation, was carried live to several countries.

Dr Mahathir, who spoke from Angkasapuri, was asked a wide range of questions by a TV host and newspaper journalists from India, Pakistan, Japan and the Philippines.

Dr Mahathir also said developed countries should be fair in their assessment of the environment in developing countries instead of just making accusations.

He said although Malaysia had been careful in the logging of its forests, it had even been accused of practising genocide against the natives.

"We are as concerned about the environment as anybody else," he added.

He blamed developed countries which were "burning too much fuel" for the degradation of the environment.

On democracy, he said it could only work if people were responsible and self-disciplined.

"I think there is too much faith in pure democracy as if when there is democracy everything will go right. But democracy can only bring about good if the people know the limitations of democracy," he said. "If people think that by democracy they can go to the streets and demonstrate and assault people they don't like, then democracy is not going to be very good for anyone."

Asked whether he thought that the demonstrations in Eastern Europe were marvellous, he replied: "Yes ... because they brought down a totalitarian government. But what happens if it keeps bringing down democratic governments every now and then?"

Asked whether there was any other choice, Dr Mahathir said: "There is a choice; we have to learn

interpretation to serve their own purpose.

Dr Mahathir said he believed in the eastern interpretation of what was civil responsibility and how a society should be governed.

"If we are different from the west, it doesn't mean we are wrong

this is the problem that we face now," he said.

At this juncture, the audience at the Philippine International Convention Centre where the show was broadcast applauded.

Impressed by Dr Mahathir's straight forward style of replies, show moderator Bernard Kalb

the limits of democracy. We must not misuse the freedom that we have. We must be self-restrained."

On the Vietnamese boat people, he said Malaysia had been very hospitable, accepting them for the past 15 years.

"But there must be a limit to the outflow of the boat people. At the moment, there is no reason to believe they are being oppressed," he said, adding that they left their country because they wanted a better life in the US, Australia and Canada.

"They want to make use of Malaysia as a half-way house. I don't see why we should treat them the way we treat refugees (who fled) from oppression."

On religion, Dr Mahathir said it could play a role in society if it was interpreted correctly.

"In Malaysia, most people are affected by religious thinking and because of that, they exert considerable influence over policies and what is happening in the country," he said.

This was not a bad thing, he said, but added that there were extremists who make their own

remarked that the prime minister had "won the first round of applause."

Dr Mahathir said the whole interpretation of society, of rights and wrongs were still based on what western thinkers believed.

"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."

On the nuclear weapons issue, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had always been against nuclear weapons.

"That is why we proposed a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality in this region," he said.

On the effects of the end of the cold war, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't think it is all that good because we feel there is a need for balance between the two blocs, then at least we have a choice."

On the relationship between Asian developing countries and Japan, he said the best thing Japan could do would be to invest more in developing countries.