

SHARING THE COMMON WEALTH

13 MAR 1990

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he is happy to note that the Commonwealth has shed many of the "negative traits" of its former self.

Paying tribute to the Commonwealth, the prime minister said the grouping had initiated and adopted many programmes of action which reflected the aspirations of member countries, particularly the developing ones.

"We are beginning to share many of the things that we collectively possess.

"I also believe that perhaps it may not be long before we may be able to probably share the 'common wealth' that the Commonwealth has," he told members of the Royal Commonwealth Society (Malaysian branch) during a luncheon at the Commonwealth House here to mark Commonwealth Day.

Dr Mahathir was made an honorary member of the society at the function.

Dr Mahathir said that in the past, the Commonwealth views were divergent and consequently ineffective over major international economic and political issues, although it had initiated various forms of co-operation for the benefit of its members, most notably the Colombo Plan and the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation.

"And more lamentable was the indifference on the part of some senior Commonwealth members to the pleas and cries for understanding by the less

fortunate members regarding their problems," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is chairman of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, said that fortunately, this was no longer valid.

"Owing to changing circumstances and attitudes, including the growing assertiveness among member countries, the grouping's more prosperous partners have come to realise that they have a moral responsibility to assist the less developed member nations which, in case we forget, they once depended upon for their wealth and power."

He said Malaysia was glad to note that due to this change in attitude, the Commonwealth had been transformed into a more cohesive and dynamic grouping.

"When in its early days, the Commonwealth was basically a forum in which the former colonial masters held discussions with its ex-colonies, today it is an undeniable fact that the Commonwealth meeting is a gathering of equals sharing common ideals and aspirations over various matters."

Dr Mahathir reiterated that Malaysia would continue its contribution and would work closely with member countries.

Commonwealth Day, originally celebrated as Empire Day from 1903 to 1958, was first observed in 1959.

Both Empire Day and Commonwealth Day used to be celebrated on May 24, the birthday of Queen Victoria. Commonwealth Day now falls on the second Monday of March.