

Dr Mahathir opens inaugural summit Self-help way for South countries

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called on developing countries to seek new approaches which would enable the South to benefit from their wealth.

Speaking at the opening of the first summit of the Group of 15 (G-15) on South-South Consultation and Co-operation, the Prime Minister said one way of achieving this was through the setting up of a South Secretariat to carry forward the momentum of tangible economic co-operation.

Setting the tone for discussions during the three-day meeting, Dr Mahathir said this self-help way could improve the lot of the peoples of the non-aligned developing nations in the face of various constraints, including those from the North.

Noting that political co-operation among the South on various international issues has achieved success, Dr Mahathir said there was an urgent need to have this spirit permeate the economic sector.

He said at present the developing South had a huge market and was accessible to the developed countries, with good reasons.

"But there is no reason why we cannot restructure our markets. We will continue to be markets for the North but we can at the same time develop our economic co-operation and trade with each other," he said in his 30-minute speech that was characteristic of his hard-hitting and candid presentation.

To do this, the South needed to know what was available in their respective countries.

"How often have we purchased goods from the North when such goods are available in the South, at probably more reasonable prices?"

This is the rationale behind the Malaysian proposal to set up a Trade Information Network and a South Investment Data Exchange Centre to

service countries of the South.

The two projects are among 11 to be discussed by the heads of delegation of the 15 nations attending the summit at Carcosa Seri Negara.

To drive home his point about the potential for economic co-operation, Dr Mahathir highlighted the costly route delegates had to take to attend the summit.

Many of them had to take a costly and roundabout journey here, some through cities in the North.

This was because there was hardly any air-links among some countries in the South. The developing nations should therefore study and initiate air-links which were vital for trade.

"Contrary to what some quarters may think, the G-15 was not formed

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as a counter to the Group of Seven (G-7) industrialised countries of the North," Dr Mahathir said, adding that the grouping did not represent self-appointed arbiters and regulators of the world's economic affairs.

The group would like to foster dialogue with the North, the absence of which has caused the economic gap to widen.

If the North was blamed for some of the South's problems, it was not because we were incapable of recognising our own faults, but "the fact is that most of our problems arise from our relations with the North".

The Prime Minister also had a poser for the G-7 on the categorisation of some developing countries in East Asia as newly industrialising countries.

He said these countries, which had made economic progress, now found that any further growth was inhibited by restrictions.

"Will the countries of Eastern Europe be similarly labelled and restricted if they achieve the level of growth of the so-called Asian NICs?"

"I hope this question is not censored. I hope we get an answer," Dr Mahathir added.