

PM: EASY ON IDEOLOGIES

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — The first G15 summit opened here today with Malaysia calling for less emphasis on ideologies to enable South countries to improve co-operation among themselves and with the North.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that groups in the South should be less pre-occupied with ideologies just as the North should not insist on their style of democracy.

"Ideologies should no longer occupy our time . . . we must now turn our eyes to the well-being of our people," the

Prime Minister declared.

Dr Mahathir, who is the chairman of the three-day summit, was one of three leaders who spoke at the opening ceremony held at Parliament House. The other speakers were South Commission chairman Dr Julius Nyerere and Senegal President Abdou Diouf.

Dr Mahathir's message was conveyed against a backdrop of the changing world situation, with the division between East and West disappearing.

He welcomed the global change towards the democratic system, but feared that "democracy has become the kind of religion that communism became."

His worry was that "a system devised to free people and permit them to decide

their own destiny is becoming a system that is worshipped for itself."

"Democracy is no longer a means to an end but has become an end in itself. Liberal democrats in the West have now set themselves up as the high priests of democracy," Dr Mahathir said.

And woe betide those who did not comply with "the latest interpretation of their democratic faith," he added.

For them, "chaos, instability and retarded economic growth . . . are a small price to pay for the liberalism of democracy," he said.

"Sanctions and trade restrictions and vicious campaigns that impoverish the already poor are the weapons they use to force their liberal democratic ideas on those they deemed not measuring up to their standards."

Dr Mahathir could detect "little difference" in the methods they used from the subversive strategy of the communists.

He conceded that "generally the governments of the West are not involved."

"But pressure groups or the non-governmental organisations set up by citizens in Western nations are so powerful and financially strong that it is usually beyond the ca-

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capacity of most of the countries of the South to resist or counter," Dr Mahathir said.

He said these groups had control of the international media which was almost totally denied their victims. This enabled them to threaten the exports of developing countries and exert influence to foist their democratic norms on others, he said.

"In fact, it amounts to imperialism by other means. And like imperialism in the past, the subject nations languish and suffer without any means of redress," Dr Mahathir added.

The Prime Minister made it clear that he did not consider developing countries blameless: "If we blame the North for some of our problems it is not because we are incapable of recognising our own faults."

The fact of the matter, he said, was that most of the problems of developing countries arose from relations with the North.

"Our problems cannot be because of South-South interaction since we really have very little to do with each other."

Talking about groups in the South, he said the Non-Aligned Movement started because there was a need for

a third force when the world was divided into two blocs: East and West.

"But the world has changed. East and West division has almost completely disappeared. Politics and its related military postures are no longer important. Economic matters now dominate," he said.

As Dr Mahathir saw it: "We too must change. Ideologies should no longer occupy our time."

He admitted that there were still many who had to be liberated from alien domination, and gave a promise of continued support for their cause. "But we must now turn our eyes to the well-being of our people," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the changes taking place now would have great significance for the future, and no part of the world was left untouched.

"Fortunately, almost all the changes taking place are for the good of the human race," he said.

He offered best wishes to the peoples of Eastern Europe who had discarded centralised power in favour of liberal democracy.

He hoped they would not be disillusioned, would learn quickly and be successful because "their prosperity can contribute to the common wealth of nations."



Dr Mahathir called on developing countries to make their large economic market accessible to the South.

"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.

For a start, he said, developing nations should learn more about one another's needs, laws, regulations, systems of imports and distribution, financial and currency matters.

"The advanced trading nations of the North are knowledgeable about these things simply because their private companies and public agencies

have been in this business for decades and even centuries," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the South must keep its members informed of the economic opportunities. This was why Malaysia was proposing a trade information network and a South investment data exchange centre.

He also explained why Malaysia and 14 other countries decided to set up the G15 in Belgrade last year. The other members are Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru, Senegal, Venezuela, Yugoslavia and Zimbabwe.

He said the group's aim was not to counter the industrialised North, but to enable developing countries to seek answers to their problems.

"I wish to stress here, lest our gathering here is misunderstood by others, that we are not self-appointed arbiters and regulators of the world's economic affairs, neither are we conspirators against the North," he said.

Touching on the huge debt problem faced by the Third World, Dr Mahathir said it was not due to these nations purposely wanting to borrow

and refusing to pay up.

"We borrowed at a time of worldwide economic prosperity when the lenders themselves fully believed in our capacity to repay," he said.

He said the worldwide recession that followed and the devaluation of the currencies of developing nations were not caused by the Third World.

"Lenders must be prepared to accept the risks of lending and to devise workable solutions, and if all else fails, to accept losses."

Dr Mahathir said that South nations must continue their dialogue with the North to solve their debt problems and the deteriorating terms of trade.

"We are not simply shifting blame, but the fact is that without co-operation and understanding of the North we cannot resolve these South problems," he added.

In the overall, he wanted a realistic attitude from developing countries: "The South cannot really expect others to solve their problems to their own detriment. At best they will only help on a basis of enlightened self-interest."