

# How developing nations can influence future trade pact

# Be assertive, says Dr M

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**From  
Ahmad A. Talib**

BCENOS AIRES, Tues. — Developing countries need to assert themselves in international forums so that collectively they can help influence future trade regimes, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

The Prime Minister added that these countries might require some time to become a cohesive force but this should not be impossible if they pushed themselves hard to achieve their objectives.

He said this could be achieved through a disciplined approach. In this context, the G15, as an entity, has the potential to be influential politically and economically.

Dr Mahathir highlighted these points during a dialogue with Argentinian businessmen here. The dialogue was organised by the Argentinian Foundation of Scientific and International Studies.

He was asked to comment on the prospects of South-South co-operation, particularly in relation to initiatives made under the auspices of the G15.

He was also asked whether the G15 had made any progress in terms of promoting more co-operation among its members and among developing countries.

Speaking through an interpreter, Dr Mahathir told the packed hall that the G15 has only been in existence for about a year.

It might be difficult to quantify its achievement.

but some recommendations made following its first meeting in Kuala Lumpur last year have already been implemented.

Of these, the arrangement to guarantee payments on import-export transactions among businessmen in some member countries by the relevant central banks has already been in operation.

Dr Mahathir said this would help promote confidence among companies which might be doing business with each other for the first time, especially when they were not familiar with each other's systems and practices.

The dialogue turned livelier when a participant requested the Prime Minister

**MORE REPORTS**  
**-IN P4**

to comment on the proposed arrangement among some Latin American countries to develop its own common market by 1996. He was asked whether the proposed common market would have any significant impact on South-South co-operation.

The same person also wanted to know the Prime Minister's views on the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), especially in today's changing political, social, economic and international environment.

Dr Mahathir said the NAM might have to look deep into itself, especially in a unipolar world scenario. He pointed out that the

**PLEASE TURN TO**  
**P4, COL 1**

# Dr M: China also wants to trade

MST 03 JUL 1991

FROM PAGE 1

world today was less interested in political ideologies.

Instead, the world today is increasingly concerned with economic growth as this will give a better life to everyone. In this context, the members of NAM, which are developing countries, should concentrate more on economic endeavours rather than narrow political issues. His response went down well with the audience.

When he replied to a question on China's position, particularly following the handing over of Hong Kong to the mainland in 1997 by the British Government, the audience showed their approval with applause.

The Prime Minister said he believed that China would not undergo much changes ideologically. Hong Kong's return to China will have a positive influence on that country because China wants to trade too.

Just because some students demonstrated in Tiananmen Square did not mean that one billion Chinese would become democratic, Dr Mahathir said. Therefore, he would not expect many changes in the region.

The Prime Minister based his opinion on the assumption that China values foreign exchange as much as Malaysia. China places as much value on the US dollar as much as Malaysia, he said, meaning that the foreign exchange revenue was essential to all trading countries.

Articulating further on South-South collaboration, Dr Mahathir said much would depend on member countries themselves. Some countries rose to have empires of their own, only to weaken and have their growth diminished by regression and complacency.