

PM: No monopoly to decide Don't preach,

By Ahmad A. Talib

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the West should not preach to the East about human rights, adding that nobody has the monopoly of wisdom to determine what is right and proper for all countries and peoples.

The Prime Minister said it would be condescending, to say the least, for the West to do this. In this regard, attempts by industrialised countries to link trade, investment and finance to issues of human rights are added conditionalities and protectionism by other means, he said.

Governments in developing countries constantly face the problem of securing a fine balance between the need to ensure national economic development and the kind of individual and group disruptive activities which tend to destabilise society and inhibit growth.

Developing countries question the motive of such attempts. Many are inclined to believe that the move is political and self-serving, Dr Mahathir said in his address at the opening of the 24th Asean Ministerial Meeting at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

Foreign Ministers from the Asean six are gathered here for the meeting which is to be followed by the Post Ministerial Conference (PMC) on Monday.

Dr Mahathir said: "The West tells us that democratic freedom and human rights are fundamental for the achievement of economic and social development. We in Asean never disputed that democracy for the people and opportunity for the individual to develop his or her own greatest potentials are indeed important principles.

"We disagree, however, that democracy has only one definition or that political systems qualify as democratic only when they measure up to certain particular yardsticks.

"Similarly, the norms and

what's right for all countries

West told

precepts for the observance of human rights vary from society to society and from one period to another within the same society.

"Nobody can claim to have the monopoly of wisdom to determine what is right and proper for all countries and peoples. It would be condescending, to say the least, and suspect for the West to preach human rights to us in the East."

The Prime Minister then narrated Asean's experience in its quest for peace and stability vis-a-vis development and progress. In Asean, he said, peace and security, democracy and freedom as well as stability are possible and sustainable only when the people are free from economic deprivation and have a stake in the national life.

Rightly, Asean has placed a high premium on political stability by managing a balance between the rights of the individual and the needs of the society as a whole, he said.

This has enabled Asean to make great strides in the socio-economic advancement of their peoples. It has also enhanced the resilience of individual countries and the Asean region as a whole.

But even then, Asean needs to do more, even though the group is now 24 years old, much envied, is cohesive, and united by shared geography, common

goals and economic dynamism, Dr Mahathir said.

The group must proceed to a higher plane of co-operation, collective action and self-reliance in order to have an effective voice in international, inter-regional and multilateral forums.

Only a strong and united Asean can exert its collective weight and voice to ensure that justice, fair-play and even-handedness continue to be the guiding principles in the construction of the new international political and economic order, he said.

It is only a strong and united Asean which can contribute towards shaping that new order, Dr Mahathir added.

"The new world order which we should strive for is not only one that is free from the threat of war, but it should also be a world free from poverty, hunger and diseases as well as an order which promotes equal economic opportunity and easy access to modern technology for all countries and peoples.

"Most important of all, it should be a world order which recognises that countries and peoples can and must be allowed to maximise their national political, economic and social potentials in ways compatible with their historical, cultural and national circumstances."