

'FIND BEST WAYS TO CONTINUE ASSISTANCE'

Set up tripartite aid group: Dr M

By HARDEV KAUR

MALAYSIA has called for a tripartite group, comprising the donor, recipient and a third party, to be set up to study how best aid can be continued to be provided. Aid should not be simply held back "because of alleged breaches of human rights or whatever," Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

In making the call, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir suggested that ways be found to ensure that assistance is continued while keeping "breaches of human rights" in check.

He acknowledged that there may be political reasons for certain cases of recalcitrance on the part of debtors but this should not be simply condemned. Instead they should be studied and solutions found, he said.

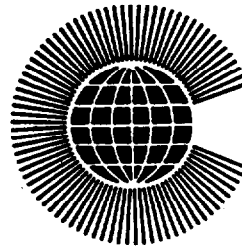
Opening the Commonwealth Finance Ministers meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, the Prime Minister said that the restructuring of debts cannot be resolved by merely asking the debtors to practise thrift and put off development. The lenders

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and aid agencies must actively provide guidance and help. Debtors, on their part, must accept such assistance.

"The debtors and recipients of aid must also acknowledge the need to accept reasonable actions. No one will help if that help is going to be frittered away or to be used to oppress (the people) or to sustain authoritarian rule," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the linkages made between trade and aid with the democratic practices of a country should not be selective. "Friends or foes should not count. It would be a mockery and a farce if friends can get away with dictatorships and oppressions while those who are not friendly and given to plain speaking are subjected to pressures."

He said aid and trade are two issues of concern to all finance ministers. Even the rich countries which need no aid have to manage their finances well if they are to remain prosperous. "So let us not be too ready to condemn failure and to apply sanc-



MORE REPORTS: p7

tions, but instead let us help each other," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir added.

The Prime Minister said finance ministers of the Commonwealth and other economic ministers can help each other to upgrade their skills and learn approaches of sound financial management.

He added that wealth can be squandered in no time but "skills can sustain wealth and make it grow." Malaysia, he said, believes in learning from others and this is the basis of the Look East policy and "not because we want to be a colony of Japan."

The Prime Minister urged the

Commonwealth finance ministers not to just go along with the World Bank "which is about to insist on new conditionalities for aid and loans" adding that as a group they should appreciate the difficulties of the weak, the recipients of aid and the debtors.

He said if the Commonwealth countries work together in concert, decide on common stands at their meetings "during which the weak members can be heard, then it may be possible for the Commonwealth as a group or its stronger members to lend weight to the arguments and pleas of the weak."

The need for the weak to be heard has assumed greater urgency in view of the move to link aid and trade to democracy, to human rights, to workers rights and to environmental issues.

Commonwealth finance ministers must be committed to free trade, the Prime Minister said, stressing that where there are no breaches of freedom, democratic processes, human rights,

Cont'd Page 7, Col. 5

Call for tripartite aid group

FROM PAGE ONE

workers rights, and environmental protection there should not be protectionism and regulated trade.

While democracy is great, the Prime Minister hastened to point out, "it is not absolutely perfect." For it "to work the people as a whole must understand how it works, how to make it work, how to be wary of its imperfections and how to handle them."

"The people as a whole, the political parties, the oppositions, the NGOs and the pressure groups —

they must all understand the workings and the limitations of democracy," he said.

He also hailed the "glorious counter revolution", the death of communism and the spread of democracy, and the adoption of the free market regime all over the world, but said the initial fruits of the development are not the expected wealth and prosperity or even of stability and freedom from fear.

There is, in fact, increasing pov-

erty and economic chaos, political instability and civil wars, deaths and destruction in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Republics.

Despite all this, the Prime Minister told his audience "we must not be disheartened... we should acknowledge them and be more cautious and circumspect before we link aid with trade... twist arms in order to force democracy and all the other noble ideas and concepts down everyone's throats."