

LOUDER VOICE FOR THE WEAK

S 10 OCT 1991
KUALA LUMPUR: The Commonwealth must work in concert and adopt common stands so that the weaker members can be heard, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

~~"Meetings of world bodies should be attended by all the countries of the world.~~

"But there is such great disparity between the powers wielded by the world forums that small countries were often ignored and their interests relegated to the background.

"However, if the Commonwealth countries work in concert, decide on common stands at meetings at which the weak members had made their voices heard, it may be possible for the Commonwealth as a group or for the stronger members of the Commonwealth to lend weight to the arguments and pleas of the weak.

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“The need for the weak to be heard is much more urgent now for we hear talk of linking aid and trade to democracy, to human rights, to workers' rights and to the environment.”

and to the environment," he said when opening the Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting.

More than 200 delegates from 46 countries are attending the three-day meeting at the PWTC.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia was all for democracy, the protection of human rights and workers' rights, press freedom and keeping the environment unpolluted.

However, he said that acceptance of all these noble principles could not always guarantee the well-being and prosperity of peoples and nations.

He said the world today was seeing a glorious counter-revolution — the death of communism and the birth of democracy and adoption of free market system the world over.

“But it would be naive of us to fail to see that the initial fruits of the espousal of democracy and the free market are not the expected wealth and prosperity, or even of stability and freedom from fear.”

He said that in the countries of the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, there was increasing poverty and economic chaos, political instability and civil war, death and destruction.

He said that while one must not be disheartened by these, “we must be more cautious and circumspect before we link aid and trade.”

He said that for democracy to work, the people as a whole must understand how it worked, how to make it work, how to be wary of its imperfections and how to handle them.

“It is not just governments which must practise democracy. The people as a whole, the political parties, the opposition, the NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and the pressure groups — they must all understand the workings and the limitations to democracy.”

He said that whatever leverage was available should be used to spread democracy and human rights.

“But we must be careful lest in our missionary

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Dr M: We believe in learning from others

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“zeal we destroy the very people we wish to help.”

Dr Mahathir also said that whether a country prospered depended on how money was spent and invested.

Even rich countries had to manage their finances well, he said.

“So let us not be too ready to condemn failure and to apply sanctions, but instead let us help each other first.

“Malaysia believes in learning from others. We devised the Look East policy not because we want to be a colony of Japan but because we feel we can learn from how Japan managed to emerge from a most devastating war, including destruction by atom bombs, to become the greatest economic power.”

Dr Mahathir said a simplistic approach to solving the problem of distribution of wealth and the wide gaps between the rich and the poor would appear to be to give everyone equal opportunities and let them achieve their own levels.

He said that while this was very democratic, “equal opportunities do not give equal results.”

“So, in a world so enamoured with democracy and equality, let us remember that handicaps, that is, positive discrimination or affirmative action are still necessary in order to be equal,” he said.