

Malaysia fast emerging as a leader of the 3rd World

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MALAYSIA is increasingly being looked upon as a leader for the Third World and developing countries. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad with his outspoken and no nonsense posture has elevated Malaysia's profile in the world. Today the nation is being looked upon as a "spokesman" for the Third World. Its views are listened to by the developed world despite the fact that some do not like to hear what they are told. They nevertheless take note.

A number of leaders said so at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Harare, Zimbabwe, recently. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir in his usual blunt manner, articulated views on democracy, human rights, protectionism and a host of other issues. Some were not so "palatable" to the developed countries. Developed members, such as Canada and the UK, had their own interpretation of democracy and human rights and want their standards imposed upon and practised by the developing countries. Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, for example, said that Canada will tie its aid to human rights and democratic principles. But these principles and standards will be determined by Canada using its own yardstick.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir explained that the standards set out



attitude has been "Do as we say. Listen to us as we know what is best for you."

Developing countries had and some still do, follow what they are told. Bangladesh Premier Begum Khalida was quoted as saying that she was agreeable to the conditions being imposed on her country for the aid. Perhaps Bangladesh, which is in desperate need for foreign assistance is prepared to succumb to the conditions. But this does not mean that other developing countries like Malaysia and Singapore should continue to be considered as "colonies" of the developed world.

Battle

The independence of these countries should be respected. They have unique problems and situations to deal with which are vastly different from the internal situations in the developed countries. The former colonial masters should realise that they no longer rule them. The independent states should be left to run their own affairs and decide what is best for them and their peoples.

Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case. Most of the developed countries want to continue to dictate terms and tell the developing countries how to run their affairs. They seem to forget

that they no longer rule these countries. Secondly, many developing countries, unlike Malaysia, do not have the stature, muscle nor the economic strength to stand up for their rights and thus speak up. The developed countries will "twist" their arms. This has been the case with Malaysia. But Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said recently it will not stop him from speaking up.

Democratic principles practised in Britain and Canada today evolved over the years. What they considered to be democratic principles in the last century are not so democratic today. Surely the developing countries cannot be expected to measure up to the standards of the developed world when they have other more urgent issues at hand to consider.

For example, Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao said democracy in India had caused tremendous misery to its people. It had not eradicated poverty in the country nor has it assisted the Government in moving the economy forward.

'Colonies'

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir told the Commonwealth leaders that the developing countries should be allowed to develop and progress at their own pace and in accordance with the local culture and environment. Western standards cannot be imposed on developing countries as they are alien to the nations' peoples. Their immediate and more urgent needs are for food, shelter and education.

A number of leaders from developing countries while subscribing to what Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir had said did not articulate them nor were prepared to speak up. Only when the Prime Minister had told the meeting that developing countries cannot be expected to follow the standards set by the developed world, that others came up to Malaysian officials and Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir himself to say that they felt the same way.

There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, of course is the character of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir. He is not afraid to speak up. Developed countries do not like to be told off by those from the developing countries. Their

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Malaysia is facing and will continue to face an uphill battle in almost all fronts. Tariff and non-tariff barriers will continue to be erected against Malaysian products. The anti-tropical timber campaigns will continue to gather momentum as will new areas for complaints will be found, including the human rights issues and Malaysian laws. Other means to prevent Malaysia from forging ahead will be devised by the developed countries. But this will not prevent Malaysia from speaking up for its rights and that of other developing countries.

There is a price to be paid. And Malaysia is well prepared to do so. After all, it is the future of the country and its people that is at stake. Who knows what is best for Malaysia than Malaysians themselves.

This was clearly demonstrated when Malaysia rejected "advice" from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) some years ago to restructure its economy. The Fund, which is dominated by the developed countries such as the US, had outlined various conditions which were not acceptable to the Government. The then Finance Minister, Tun Daim Zainuddin, declined to follow the advice and today the Malaysian economy is viewed as a model for most developing countries. Now even the IMF lavishes praise on the management of the Malaysian economy. But of course, the economy is today registering growth rates which are but a dream for most developed countries. This should act as a lesson, but unfortunately the developed countries are not prepared to accept the fact that developing countries can make the right decisions for themselves.

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