

Caribbean, Asean 'can work together'

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LATIN American and Caribbean regional groupings can become **Asean's** dialogue partners and help each other, Prime Minister **Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad** said here yesterday.

Noting that the European Community (EC) is an **Asean** dialogue partner, he said he sees no reason why dialogue partnership cannot be extended to Latin America and the Caribbean.

"The Caribbean group will be interested in **having dialogue** with us and we can find out how we can help each other," he told a news conference at the end of a three-day visit to this West Indian island nation.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, who left for Barbados en-

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route home. said this had also been mentioned during the summit of the Group of 15 developing countries which he attended in the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, from November 27 to 29.

He said that if the regional groupings, like the **Andean** group and the Rio Group in Latin America and the Organisation of East Caribbean States (OECS) are interested, **Asean** can study the possibility of having them as dialogue partners.

He will be reporting on his meetings in Venezuela and the Caribbean to the **Asean** heads of government meeting in Singapore next month.

In St Lucia, **Datuk Seri Dr**

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Caribbean; Asean can work together

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Mahathir held discussions with Prime Minister John Compton and met Grenada Prime Minister Nicholas Braitwaite at a lunch organised by the local private sector on Monday.

On transit in Barbados, he will meet his counterpart, Mr Erskine Sandiford, during a brief tour of the island which is also a member of the Commonwealth.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, who was asked about the implications of the EC single market next year, said the EC is evolving into a closed trading area which will discriminate against developing countries because it needs to support its own production capacities.

Reiterating Malaysia's stand against trading blocs, he said quotas and various qualifications on local content are being imposed and the situation will become more severe.

Nevertheless, Malaysia is talking to the more liberal members of the EC, like Britain, to get as much advantage as possible, he added.

He also mentioned the formation of the North American Free Trade Area (Nafta) which he said may

be extended to Central and South America and become a big trading bloc that will stifle free trade.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said: "What we have done is to try to collect the countries of East Asia together so that, at the Gatt meetings and Uruguay Round (of Multilateral Trade Negotiations), we can speak for free trade. Our countries' development depends on free trade,

"We will have to come together and talk as developing nations, maybe with the support of the Caribbean countries, at international forums to maintain free trade, for that is the only way our own markets can grow.

"Our people are too poor to stimulate economic growth."

On environmental issues, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said he feels it is grossly unfair of the developed countries to ask developing countries to maintain the quality of the environment while they (the North) do very little about it.

He added that countries of the South should come together and speak with one voice, particularly at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Devel-

opment in Rio de Janeiro next year.

"Otherwise, the NGOs (non-governmental organisations) of the North are going to demonstrate and bring down governments not caring about their environment," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir also said the Commonwealth, though it has been called a social club, is useful for contacts and it has been responsible for some progressive moves, for example, with regard to South Africa.

And recently, it has been able to persuade Britain and Canada to write off a considerable amount of debt owed to them by developing countries.

He was asked Malaysia's opinion on the increasing tendency by developed countries to link aid to what they consider a clean human rights record.

He said no one country should decide whether aid should be given or not.

"Simply because they are the source of aid, doesn't mean that they have the right to make judgements. If there is to be any judgement, then that judgement must be made by a neutral body. otherwise, the judgement may be based on bias and self-interest; and that is not right," he added.

Asked about Malaysia's position on the US's economic sanctions against Cuba, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said that except in the case of South Africa, Malaysia had never supported sanctions.

To Malaysia, Cuba is another country with which Malaysia has diplomatic and trade relations. "As much as we don't like arm-twisting by any great power, we do not like this to be applied to Cuba," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, who is the first Prime Minister from Malaysia, and possibly Asia, to visit St Lucia, one of the Windward Islands in the West Indies, said his trip, has been a satisfying one which has enabled him to learn about the Caribbe-

an, St Lucia in particular, its economy and development.

He said both countries have a lot to learn about each other: Malaysia about the highly developed tourist industry here and St Lucia some of the things that Malaysia has been successful in.

He offered Malaysia's assistance to St Lucia under the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme and said Malaysia is prepared to share the knowledge it has gained in science and technology, relevant to St Lucia's needs.

He mentioned agricultural research, aquaculture and food production as some of the fields in which Malaysia

can provide assistance.

Malaysia produces a lot of things which may be of use to St Lucia, among which is palm oil, the cheapest edible oil available, he said.

As Malaysia exports large amounts of palm oil to the US and all over the world, it may be useful to have a palm oil distribution depot in St Lucia for distribution of the product to other countries in the Caribbean.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, who was accompanied by his wife, Datuk Seri Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, rounded up his visit with a tour of the Pointe Seraphine Duty-Free Complex, reputedly the largest in the East Caribbean. — Bernama