

PM: Links with 3 Soviet republics

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By K.H. Lim

KUALALUMPUR, Tues. — Malaysia will have links with the three Soviet republics which are trying to form a new Slavic commonwealth but the issue of recognition does not arise, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the break-up of the Soviet Union could not be avoided and the problem was only the extent of the break-up.

“If small groups also want to be independent, this may lead to chaos.”

“The question is not the break-up but that of economic rehabilitation.”

“We are worried that if the Soviet economy is not rehabilitated, there will be difficulties especially among former soldiers who have lost their jobs. This may spark off violence,” Dr Mahathir said.

He was speaking to reporters after flagging off the

“Support 1998 Commonwealth Games Run” at Merdeka Square here.

Asked whether Malaysia would recognise the three republics—Russia, Ukraine and Byelorussia, Dr Mahathir said: “We don’t need to do so now but we will have links with them.”

The three republics declared two days ago the formation of a Slav-dominated Commonwealth of Independent States to replace the Soviet Union and invited

other republics to join them.

On his meeting with Australian Minister for Industry, Technology and Commerce Senator John Button today, the Prime Minister said it was a courtesy call.

Dr Mahathir said Senator Button informed him that Australia wanted to have good relations with Malaysia, especially in trade.

“We agreed with him. We have no problems with the Australian Government,” he said.