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BERNAMA YEAR-ENDER
MAHATHIR PUTS MALAYSIA ON WORLD POLITICAL MAP
Mahathir - Foreign
By Juliana Omar

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec. 16 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad continued to set a hectic pace during 1991 in his consistent quest to put Malaysia on the world political map while seeking a better deal for developing Third World countries in a year marked by the dramatic death of communism in the Soviet Union and later that of the super power itself.

His combative and no-nonsense diplomacy impressed leaders of Third World nations while those from the developed countries are forced to sit up and listen to his outspoken criticism against, how the North is solving their problems at the expense of the South.

Under his stewardship, Malaysia has been in the forefront in fighting for the rights of the developing countries in the international arena. Today, Malaysia is being looked upon as a +spokesman+ of the Third World while leaders from the developed North take note of his views even though some do not, **like what they hear.**

Even the United States administration had to respond to his persistent effort to woo Japan and South Korea into joining the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC). His statement that Malaysia would stay away from the United Nations Conference on Environment, and Development in Brazil next year warranted a personal visit by its Secretary-General Dr Morris Strong to persuade him to change his mind.

He also left his mark at the United Nations in his speech at its 46th General Assembly in New York last September where he said that there must be democracy between states of the world if democracy is to be the only acceptable system of government, within states: -- more

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He said democracy will be meaningless to developing countries if they have no right of choice at all, if democracy means that their peoples are consistently subjected to instability and disruptions and economic weaknesses making them subject to manipulation by the powerful democracies.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir is adamant that Malaysia will not bow to pressures from the developed countries which are finding fault with, developing countries by using issues such as human rights and environment.

At the 1989 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia was made chairman of the Commonwealth High Level Appraisal Group to supervise and chart a new course and role for the organisation into the 1990's and beyond. The group involved Australia, Bahamas, Britain, Canada, India, Jamaica, Nigeria, Singapore and Zambia.

At this year's CHOGM in Harare, Zimbabwe in October, Malaysia also heads the Group of 11 **to seek ways** in which the 50-member organisations could assist, in bringing about an early solution to the South African question. -- more

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During the year, Malaysia also paved the way for closer ties with the African countries and is expected to be the first country in Asia to have a direct air link with Zimbabwe.

A whole new vista is also now opened up in Malaysia-Africa relations, both at government and people-to-people level, with the government's decision to allow Malaysians to visit South Africa, ending a 30-year ban caused by South Africa's expulsion from the Commonwealth over its apartheid policy of racial discrimination and segregation.

The Harare CHOGM agreed to lift people-to-people sanctions on South Africa. This would include consular and visa restrictions, cultural and scientific boycotts, restrictions on tourism promotion and the ban on direct air link.

Malaysia also played a significant role at the second Group of 15 (G-15) Summit in Caracas, Venezuela, in **November**. and Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir addressed the meeting as a spokesman for Asia, in recognition of the role played by Malaysia in promoting South-South co-operation.

Malaysia was the prime mover in the formation of G-15, a working group for leaders of developing countries to act as a catalyst for greater co-operation among Third World countries. Its members are Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Malaysia, Mexico, **Nigeria, Peru**, Senegal, Venezuela, Yugoslavia and Zimbabwe.

During that meeting, leaders of the Group of 35 agreed to look into the possibility of expanding the body to provide for 'more balanced representation in membership. -- more

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Closer to home, Malaysia **was** also one of the signatories of the historic peace accord **in Paris which** formally ended Cambodia's 13-year conflict.

The accord was signed by the four warring factions of Cambodia and 18 nations, including the five permanent **members of** the UN Security Council on Oct. 23.

Apart from Malaysia, the other countries at the Paris conference sponsored by France and Indonesia were Australia, Brunei, Canada, China, France, India, Japan, Laos, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, the Soviet Union, Britain, United States, Vietnam and Yugoslavia.

Malaysia is still actively involved in the peace arrangement with the participation of two of its military officers in the UN Advance Mission in Cambodia (Unamic) together with 49 other officers from 23 countries, which make up the mission.

The year started against the backdrop of a 'time bomb' ticking away in the Persian Gulf, with the Jan 15 deadline set the United Nations Security Council for Iraq to quit Kuwait or face military action.

The Foreign **Ministry** organised the repatriation of some 1,700 Malaysians from several Gulf nations before the deadline expired.-- more

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The war, which started on Jan 17 when the United States-led forces attacked Iraqi targets both in Iraq and occupied Kuwait at 8 am Malaysian Time, lasted for 43 days before a ceasefire was announced on Feb 28.

Malaysia reopened its embassies in Kuwait City and Baghdad in April after the situation normalised with an offer to help in the reconstruction of both countries.

March 15 saw the return of Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to the Cabinet, as Foreign Minister and he made his firm stand known by stating that, Malaysia need not have to look up to any country or world power in the conduct of its foreign relations.

He also announced a review of Malaysia's foreign policy to reflect the importance placed by the government on economic matters like enhancing economic, trade and investment ties in line with its objective of becoming a developed country in 30 years, under the Vision 2020 programme.

During the year, Malaysia played hosts to three major international conferences -- the Asean Ministerial Meeting (AMM) and the Post-Ministerial Conference (PMC) from July 19 to July 24, the Asean Economic Ministers Meeting (Oct. 7 - Oct 8) and the Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting (Oct 8 - Oct 10). -- more

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The strained relations between Malaysia and Australia which lingered from the past, year, somewhat, eased off during 1991, thanks to the initiative of Australian Foreign Minister Senator Gareth Evans, who came to Kuala Lumpur for the PMC armed with a letter from his Prime Minister Bob Hawke.

Sen Evans made amends for the thaw in relations by admitting that the problem was caused by the Australian media which had been attacking Malaysia including the television +Embassy+ series.

When relations turned sour, visits by official delegations including businessmen of both countries were suspended and this had Australian businessmen, who have substantial investments in Malaysia, worried.

But things healed further following a meeting between the Prime Ministers of both countries at the Harare CHOGM.

And this week, the first official delegation from Australia since the strained period came to town, led by Minister of Industry, Technology and Commerce Senator John Button, who brought with him 20 leading businessmen. -- more

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After his meeting with Sen Button, the Prime Minister said: + Malaysia is familiar with the attitude of the Australian media and there is no point in paying any attention to it, +.

Malaysia's strong blitz on the foreign diplomatic front may 'well continue into the new year, which like 1991, will see the break-up of the Soviet republics inevitably taking centre-stage again.

Cambodia, an issue which Malaysia has long been associated with in efforts to end the conflict, is also expected to continue to preoccupy diplomats in the region with peace in the area still regarded as fragile.

In the new year, Malaysia is also expected to come up with a plan that will lead to a greater flow of repatriation for the 14,000 Vietnamese boat people in the Sungai Besi transit camp near here. -- Bernama