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MAHATHIR SAYS ASEAN SHOULD WELCOME THE INDOCHINESE STATES

Mahathir-Asean .

SINGAPORE, Jan 27/^{az}(Bernama) -- The **Asean** countries **should** welcome the Indochinese states as members of the group subscribing to its Treaty of Amity and Cooperation should those countries wish to- do so, Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said with the Cambodian problem almost resolved **Asean** must now transform the adversarial stance which **characterised** South East Asia in the past into new constructive relationships.

+It is not an accident that the South East Asian countries of the **Asean** group are among the most dynamic in the world,+ he said in his address at the opening of the Fourth **Asean Summit here**:

The grouping had demonstrated that **peaceful neighbourliness** and cooperation and a willingness to help each other could contribute greatly towards rapid development, he added.

+It is therefore equally likely that if all **the nations** of South East Asia were to adopt this approach to neighbourly relations and economic development, then all will be equally: prosperous,+ he said. -- more

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Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said **Asean** must therefore take the initiative to reorganise its relations with the Indochinese countries by beginning to establish close and positive relations with them, **both, bilaterally** and as a group.

He also called on **Asean** to promote and foster the concept of a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality as well as a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone.

+I hope that the greatest military power with the most efficient intelligence agency is wrong when it predicts the possibility of a **+Gulf War+** in East Asia which can only **be deterred** by its military presence,+ he said.

Rather, he added, all the nations of East Asia should have **learnt of** the futility of wars of conquest of the Gulf variety.'

Pointing out that poor neighbours were no **asset** to anyone, he said if **Asean** wished. to be stable and prosperous, then it must help its **neighbours** to attain prosperity.

+Above all it must eschew **confrontation**,+ he added. -- more

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Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said they should not **let** their different . . . political systems stand in the way of mutual cooperation as they must still strive to ensure acceptable standards of good government.

Stressing that it was the height of arrogance to claim that only a particular **system** of government was right and just, he **said** the fact was that even democracy could bring misery to a **lot** of people.

He added: **+This** we see in the **violence and deaths** during elections and the frequent riotings and strikes which reduce the productivity of nations and perpetuate poverty.

+We see today a democratically elected government systematically depriving its legitimate **citizens of political** rights, deporting them, terrorising and killing them and **generally behaving** 'like 'a rogue but being supported by other democracies simply because it is defined as democratic. **+**

Referring to the empty shelves and the hunger in the new democracies 'of the Commonwealth of Independent States (formerly the Soviet Union) and Eastern Europe, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said democracy was not the universal **cure** it was made out to be. -- more

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+To succeed, there must be circumspection in the application of the democratic process. No one should be forced or hurried into a system that they are unfamiliar with, **+** he added;

On the issue of environment, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir **said there** was unfortunately undue focus on the tropical forest and its role in renewing the supply of oxygen, the preservation of **flora** and fauna and the ecological balance.

Noting that it was the rich 20 per cent of the **world population** who accounted for **80** per cent of the greenhouse **gas emission**, he said if forests could save the world from the **greenhouse effect**, then the stress should be on a massive regreening of the world..'

In apparent reference to the West, Datuk **Seri Dr** Mahathir said with the wealth of the rich and the technology at their command, it was entirely possible to plant and cover even desert areas with trees. -- more

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He said one issue, totally ignored, was the fact that forest fires cause greater damage to the environment than controlled logging. In addition, developing countries did not have **the** financial and technologically capability to effectively handle forest fires.

+Certainly, more forests can be saved by preventing **forest** fires or putting them out quickly than by boycotting the export of tropical timber or advocating that forest dwellers remain in the forest, eating monkeys and suffering from all kinds of tropical diseases,+ he added.

Referring to **the** claim that tropical forests are a common heritage, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said: +We dispute this, **for** we have a better claim to our forests than those who claim to own Antarctica.+

+But if the world is so concerned about depleting tropical forest and think they have a right to it then they should 'do something about forest fires in the **tropics**,+ he added. -- Bernama

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