

It'll provide a stronger base for

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Dr M: East Asia

By Ahmad A. Talib

SINGAPORE, Mon. — The East Asian countries need the East Asia Economic Caucus, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said, stressing that the informal get-together of nations for consultations will provide a stronger base for international economic justice and fair play.

The Prime Minister, in his opening remarks at the start of the two-day Fourth Asean Summit, said: "We need a strong Asean base to be better able to face new uncertainties in the wider Asia-Pacific environment as well as a rapidly changing world.

"When the Cold War was on, we all yearned to be free from this oppressive conflict and the proxy fights and divisions which it spun off. We, in the Asean region, have a right to be freer now since it is our side which won.

"But it would seem that we are now less free. The evolving new world order is full of restrictions," Dr Mahathir said in a 15-minute address incorporating his thoughts on regional security, management of the environment and possible Asean responses to a changing world order.

Dr Mahathir said the creation of powerful economic groupings to advance regional interests have become a reality of the international economic life. International trade and oth-

er economic relations are increasingly being managed to protect the positions of the powerful trade blocs.

In a world where peoples and countries were organising themselves regionally, it should not be so wrong for East Asian countries to come together. East Asia being a geographic entity as much as Europe or America were geographical entities. Indeed, so was Southeast Asia, he added.

"If Southeast Asia can form an association in order to derive mutual benefits and still remain compatible by being members of the Asia-Pacific organisations, is there any reason why the East Asia countries cannot form a mere caucus and co-exist with other organisations in the Asia Pacific region?" the Prime Minister asked.

He said the Asean experience showed that when countries in a region consulted and co-operated and spoke with one voice, their status and influence were enhanced.

Other countries and groups would certainly not have dialogues regularly with each and everyone separately.

But as a group they would and did, Dr Mahathir said.

In the process, Asean countries gained and consequently developed much faster than other individual countries in the region, the

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economic justice, Summit told

needs EAPEC

Group won't be a trade or economic bloc, says PM

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Prime Minister added.

Dr Mahathir reminded his Asean colleagues that the proposed EAEC would not be any kind of trade or economic bloc but a caucus, an informal getting together of nations in East Asia for the purpose of consultation and to seek consensus, so as to speak with one voice at international trade negotiations.

"And that is all. We do not understand why we are not allowed to speak with each other or even to call ourselves East Asian. Is this a foretaste of the new world order?"

On global management of the environment, the Prime Minister said undue focus was given to tropical forests and its role in renewing the supply of oxygen, the preservation of flora and fauna and the ecological balance.

He added that the rich 20 per cent of the global population accounted for 80 per cent of the greenhouse gas emissions. Thirty per cent of carbon dioxide emissions came from one industrial power alone.

On the other hand in the developing world, about 1.5 billion people lived in abject poverty. Their fate was ignored when what was often their main source of in-

come, the tropical forest products, were boycotted.

Dr Mahathir also argued that if the world was so concerned about depleting tropical forest and thought that they had a right to it, then they should do something about forest fires in the tropics.

In this regard, the Prime Minister said massive and valuable equipment in the rich countries should be catalogued and deployed to poor tropical countries whenever there was a fire.

"This is much more constructive rather than dramatising the acreage of tropical forest destroyed per day or how 300 Penans are being deprived of their million hectares of hunting ground," he said.

Dr Mahathir also reminded the international community to appreciate the problems and the dangers faced by littoral States. These States faced risks from dangerous cargo which were shipped through their States as well as frequent threats of piracy on the high seas.

"Is it too much to ask that those who use the passage and the maritime nations contribute towards the cost of keeping them free and safe?" he asked.