

Dr Mahathir calls 'for bigger Asean role in new world order

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By **K.P. Waran**

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. -- Asean must resolve to play a major role in making the new world order a better and more caring one, **Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad** said today.

The Prime Minister said the world order should be comprehensively improved, characterised by greater justice and anchored in the principle of equality and mutual respect.

He said it should be wedded to the principle of global fraternity and the democratic participation of all states, small and big.

Delivering the keynote address at the first Asean Congress on the theme **Asean -- the Next Generation: Old Wisdom and New Directions**, organised by Asean-Institute of Strategic and International Studies, he said:

"If we sit still and do nothing, the new world order

will be made without us. Asean must clearly and deliberately decide that this will not come to pass. Asean must act to make the new world order not only new but also better."

Dr Mahathir said it was also imperative that Asean played a role in ensuring an open global system.

This, he said, was to ensure that the regional economies of Europe, America and East Asia would be the epitome of open regionalism and that they would enrich the linkages and the processes of interdependence.

"Asean will have to act with force and statesmanship to strengthen our position with the East Asian regional economy while maintaining and even enhancing our linkages with the Western European bloc and the Nafta bloc.

"If we are successful, we will be making an important contribution to an open global economy, to an open

Western Europe and an open Nafta".

Dr Mahathir said it was crucial that the present global trading system opens up, widens and deepens and it was crucial to ensure that all the integrating regional economies become processes for increasing open regionalism.

He also stressed the importance for the world to ensure that the economic intercourse and linkages between the East Asian, the Western Europe and Nafta (North American Free Trade Agreement) economies were widened and deepened.

"A Fortress Europe, a Fortress America and a Fortress East Asia will be calamitous to all of us."

He said while peace and harmonious relations had been the bedrock of Asean, the time had come to bring economics to the core of the Asean enterprise.

In a world where interna-

tional relations were being dictated by economic considerations, he said, failure to have an effective, meaningful and workable programme of economic co-operation that ensures a stake for all would only make Asean a toothless tiger rather than the aspired economic tiger.

After a modest achievement in economic co-operation, Asean recently made a giant leap forward towards far-reaching economic co-operation by agreeing to the Common Effective Preferential Tariff (CEPT) arrangement that would lead to the Asean Free Trade Area within 15 years.

Dr Mahathir said Asean must ensure that CEPT works so that the process of trade liberalisation would be completed within 15 years, although it was Malaysia's hope that AFTA % % be firmly in place sooner.

He added that since Asean

had a productive "post-Ministerial Conference" system at the end of the annual Asean Ministerial Meeting there was a need to develop the Asean Economic Ministers Meeting in a similar direction to enrich the process and making it more productive for national and regional interests.

Later speaking to the Press, he said economic matters were covered during the Asean Foreign Ministers' Meeting but as economic matters became complicated, there was a need for the issues to be taken up by economic ministers.

He added that there were details which had to be taken into consideration and that only the economic ministers would be in a better position to highlight problems requiring decision-making. In his speech,

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Need to pave way for expansion of

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Dr Mahathir also called for the development of closer relations in all fields with other non-Asean Southeast Asian nations to not only assist in their development efforts but also pave the way for their eventual mem-

bership in Asean. Malaysia hopes that the Asean Six would transform into an Asean-10 that would include Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar in the not too distant future.

He added that only when all the countries of Southeast Asia were joined to-

gether by a common sense of vision and purpose could there be mutual trust, peace and stability in the region.

"Economically, it would be fair to envisage that by 2017, at the end of the Asean second generation, there could be more than one developed industrial country

within Asean.

"And there will be several NIEs. And should Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar join Asean there will be NIEs and near-NIEs enjoying common prosperity with reduced economic gaps."

Dr Mahathir said there has been recent questions

Asean, says Dr Mahathir

whether Asean was superfluous and whether it was any longer necessary.

"In Malaysia we have a saying: 'Do not throw away the stick once you have crossed the river'. Asean has clearly been an invaluable instrument to help us meet the challenges that

have confronted us over the last quarter century.

"We should be grateful to the stick that has helped us cross the many rivers to get to where we are today.

"Since we have so many more rivers to cross in the days ahead, Asean's agenda for the second generation is

long and demanding.

"It is the height of folly to take Asean for granted. Instead now is the time to take Asean to a new plane and new horizons.

"It is indeed time to recommit ourselves to old wisdoms and new directions," he said.