

Dr M: Leave developing nations alone

From

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HONG KONG, Thurs. — Malaysia, and developing countries generally, should be left alone for a while to enable them to continue their growth without having to deal with conditions imposed on them by developed nations! Prime Minister Datuk Sen Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

Answering questions from the floor after his keynote address at the opening of the Europe-East Asia Economic Forum here last night, he said developed nations should allow the developing nations to grow first without all forms of barriers, some of which may adversely affect the stability of the latter.

"We can't afford that... we need the stability. So, leave us alone for while."

Dr Mahathir was asked to elaborate on what he perceived to be attempts to gang up against developing countries by developed nations.

"We've been asked to accept certain conditions. At a time when we're about to take off, we get our preferential treatment being taken away. This means that we can't grow any more."

"There'll be no development that way and we can't prosper. Have the conditions later on when we are at par by all means, but leave us alone for the time being," Dr Mahathir said to the delight of his audience, including more than 200 chief executives of some of the world's leading companies and corporations.

He said developing countries were often questioned on their human rights record. These countries were often labelled as not being democratic enough, he said, but added that this should best be determined by the

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palm oil while other countries have initiated other forms of assistance.

He added that East Asian countries needed the market these countries might offer in the future. "These things, though seemingly small, are already being done but Europe may have a bigger burden in terms of helping these countries due to their close geo-cultural affinity."

His response to the last question drew some laughter from the audience. He was asked to comment on the position regarding the Group of Seven and the Security Council, where Asia is represented by one of its more wealthy nations.

He said the selection of these countries was undemocratic. "Who elected them there in the first place? Membership to the Security Council was determined just after the Second World War, 47 years ago."

"Why should we be tied to a decision made so many years ago. I think the membership of these groups should be more balanced. Malaysia is not seeking to be a member of both, but we want to see a more balanced representation."

Just before his departure to Japan, Dr Mahathir said his trip had enabled him to meet some prominent business figures who had come to participate in the forum.

He said he has managed to clarify further the position regarding the proposed East Asia Economic Caucus and other matters affecting North-South relations.

Asked what more could be done to ensure outsiders, especially investors, understand the country's stand and policies, Dr Mahathir said more explanation was needed.

He added that efforts should be made to meet these people regularly and as often as possible.

people themselves and not by outsiders.

He said unions in developing countries like Malaysia were also subject to agitation by their Western counterparts. "I suspect that this is an attempt to undermine the low-cost labour element among developing countries which is their biggest attraction to investors, thus providing them with the vital competitive edge needed to stay in international competition."

He said developing countries like Malaysia depended very much on the low-cost labour factor in its economic growth because it had no technology, no capital and no management know-how.

Dr Mahathir, fielding questions in his usual confident manner, was also asked to indicate what kind of assistance was being considered for East European countries making the switch to free-market enterprise.

He said Malaysia had already extended certain credit facilities to Russia to buy