

Dr M tells why East Asian nations have Firming up EAEC

By Farush Khan

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — The concept of an East Asia Economic Caucus "must be firmed up further" to face a future full of uncertainties even for this region which has achieved remarkable success, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

The Prime Minister said: "Calamities and disasters are always possible even for those with brilliant records. Japan is the current example.

"It is, therefore, all the more crucial and imperative for nations of East Asia to work together in a more integrated and cohesive manner."

Dr Mahathir, opening the Pacific Rim Business Collaboration Symposium at the Istana Hotel here, reiterated that the EAEC was consistent with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and was committed to free trade.

"The EAEC is a result of, and intended for, open regionalism. On the one hand, it recognises the need for regional co-operation and integration and on the other it promotes free trade. Countries of East Asia must work together."

He allayed any fears the West might have about an Asian grouping.

He noted that Europeans and North Americans were much more homogenous than Asians.

Even in East Asia, the people are not only ethnically different but are also divided by culture, language and religion.

It is quite impossible for Asians to think of themselves the way Europeans see themselves — being of one race and one colour.

"So, the idea of an integrated Asian community borders on the ridiculous," Dr Mahathir said.

"Not so an Asian or an

East Asian forum or caucus, designed to discuss common economic problems and, to a limited extent, to help pull up those among the East Asian countries which are lagging behind.

"The EAEC is, therefore, a logical follow-up to the economic interaction in East Asia in the post-World War Two years.

"The EAEC is good for the governments of East Asia which, by and large, are concerned to see that their countries achieve economic well-being.

"The EAEC is, of course, good for the business community of East Asia as well," he added.

The three-day symposium was one of the programmes of the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (Asli), launched by the Chief Secretary to the Government, Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid, on Sept 15.

The symposium is organised by Asli, the International Infotrade Inc of the United States, and Sabit Sdn Bhd.

Dr Mahathir also stressed that a strong, stable government was a major pre-requisite for success.

He said that strong governments were prepared to make unpopular decisions in the best interests of the nation.

"Strong, stable governments adopt a longer term outlook on macro-planning and are not just concerned with the next general election," he said.

Dr Mahathir noted there was a strong correlation between rapid economic growth and strong stable governments in East Asia.

Strong governments, he added, provided the necessary stability and predictability so essential to long-term investments.

He said a strong govern-

PLEASE TURN TO
PAGE 2, COL 1

to work together
concept

PM: Democracy must serve the people

MST 6 DEC 1999

□ FROM PAGE ONE

ment did not mean the absence of free, democratic elections.

"When people understand the limitations and the responsibility of citizens, democracy can be practised without democratic extremism and anarchy," he said.

Dr Mahathir went on to say that "democracy is meant to serve the people, not the people to serve democracy".

He warned that the devotion to democracy resulted in a stagnant economy, high rate of unemployment and the denial of the right to work, and work hard.

"When democracy protects fascists and neo-Nazis; when the individual activist takes precedence over the silent masses, then it is time to question whether we have correctly interpreted democracy.

"It is important to remember that fanatical democrats are no better than religious fanatics.

"They both cannot see the wood for the trees," he said.

The Prime Minister said that in the West, democracy "means many things to different people".

"To us in Asia, democracy means our citizens are entitled to free and fair elections. They can choose the governments of their liking," he said.

He said Malaysians also believed that once the Government was elected, it should be allowed to govern and to formulate policies and act on them.

"Our democracy does not confer complete licence for citizens to go wild," he said, adding that the country needed political stability, predictability and consistency to provide the necessary

environment for progress and economic development.

"Thus we have seen the Singapore story unfolded by Mr Lee Kuan Yew and now continued by Mr Goh Chok Tong.

"We see this in Indonesia's success story with President Suharto, staying at the helm for almost 30 years," he said.

On Malaysia's policies, Dr Mahathir said the country would continue its liberal economic policies and development programmes.

"Our policies will remain consistent, predictable and transparent.

"For us the challenge of managing success is just as important as managing problems during a recession," he said.

He expressed confidence that with the positive measures taken, Malaysia was better equipped to cope with

any cyclical downturn.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and his wife, Datin Seri Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik and visiting Australian Trade Minister Peter Cook was also present at the dinner.

Others present included co-chairman of the organising committee Dr Raphael Boritzer, senior vice-president of Sharp Corporation, Japan, Y. Wada and president of Sungei Way Group Datuk Jeffrey Cheah.

Asli is aimed at serving the needs of Government agencies, commerce and industry.

Its principal business activities are vision-building for companies, corporate strategic planning, strategic analysis, business conferences and human-resource development.