

DROP 'MACHO' IMAGE

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PM: Asia Pacific
nations should
open up to the world

By LEE KAR YEAN and SHAHANAAZ SHER HABIB

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called on Asia Pacific countries to cast aside their closed, "macho" image and instead open up to the world.

He said the region's "Pacific Era" must be built on the firm foundation of a liberalising economic system.

"I believe that we owe it to the world and to ourselves to also proceed on the basis of lowering the obstacles to businesses located outside the Pacific rim.

"A mercantilist Pacific makes as much sense as a mercantilist Canada or a mercantilist Japan or a mercantilist United States.

"However macho we are on the Pacific, we must never forget the global community," the Prime Minister said in his keynote address at the opening of the 27th International General Meeting of the Pacific Basin Economic Council (PEBC) here yesterday.

Dr Mahathir also said a true Pacific community, a Pacific village or family or group of friends would need to be founded on knowledge, familiarity, understanding, empathy, mutual regard and mutual respect.

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"Many of us around this Pacific rim are as strangers, whose acquaintanceship with each other can be measured in terms of months rather than years.

"Many of us hardly know each other, are hardly familiar with each other.

"It can be no surprise that there are enormous gaps in understanding," he said.

The theme of the three-day meeting of business leaders from throughout the Pacific rim is *Profiting from Pacific Dynamism — Opportunities and Challenges for the Private Sector*.

Dr Mahathir stressed on the need for the Pacific community to escape the trap that had been a source of weakness in

Western Europe.

"The Pacific community which we should seek to build must not be inward-oriented and discriminatory towards the rest of the world.

"We would be foolish if we of the Pacific get together in order to circle our wagons, to raise the barricades and to keep everyone else out."

He said there was a need for the Pacific community to open to the exports and the investments, technology and comprehensive economic penetration of the rest of the world.

The North American Free Trade Area and the free trade area between Australia and New Zealand, he said, must all seek to reduce the barriers to external economies and to the participating

member states.

"Any East Asian scheme for economic co-operation including the East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC), which has been the victim of so much deliberate misinformation must be wedded to this idea of open regionalism."

Dr Mahathir said the cherished "Pacific Era" would be stillborn if the community quarrelled and fought among themselves.

He called on the Pacific community to discard discriminatory trading blocs and instead extend to each other the normal rules and regulations like the Most Favoured Nation status that were the norms between trading economies.

"I am sure you will also agree that a 'Pacific Era'

cannot be sustained if we do not play fair, if we do not open more fully to each other, if we do not further liberalise our economies," he said.

He added that the Pacific community should build not only a community of co-operative peace but also mutual prosperity.

"It is a central paradox of peace-making that true peace is best made when there is peace.

"It is too late when the clouds of conflict have begun to gather.

"Now and in the years ahead, to ensure the 'Pacific Era' that we want to see, we must together work intimately and diligently to build a Pacific peace worthy of the name of the ocean which washes all our shores," he added.