

Attention must be given to poverty, health and

# PM: Address social

education, Asean told

# problems

By Farush Khan

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Asean must take concerted efforts to address poverty, health, education and other problems if they want the next century to go down in history as the golden age of the region, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

The Prime Minister said that while their individual economic performance had been commendable, many problems were still unresolved.

"Pockets of poverty are found in many Asean member countries and positive actions must be taken to redress the imbalance between the haves and the many have-nots," he said.

Dr Mahathir said more attention must also be given to improving health care and raising the educational standards of the people as without them, progress would become difficult.

He was speaking at the Third Asean Achievement Award presentation ceremony at the Crown Princess Hotel here. Also present was Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah.

Ten Asean individuals received the awards given by the Asean Business Forum for their outstanding performances in their respective endeavours and disciplines. (Please see Page 14).

ABF is the region's largest private organisation with membership of more than 160 leading companies. It was established three years ago primarily to encourage intra-Asean investment and private sector trade.

Dr Mahathir said there was a need for Asean countries to continue to invest in education "in a world where new knowledge grows by geometrical progression".

"There is less need to go abroad now as our local edu-

cational institutions are more credible and they provide a wider range of courses to choose from," he said, adding that Asean countries should open up their educational institutions to each other.

Dr Mahathir spoke on "some unwelcome attention" to Asean's success, saying that efforts were being made to slow down its development through the imposition of foreign standards.

"Asean must stand together if they are going to counter this unhealthy move," he added.

Of its resources, the people were considered as Asean's greatest asset.

"But if people are to be assets for a nation, they must have skills, good values and a sense of responsibility.

"No nation can do well if the people are ill-educated and ill-trained and given to all kinds of disruptive activities," he said, adding that the development of culture compatible with growth and development must be regarded as a priority for Asean.

The Prime Minister said there was no need to focus on political or military alliances to build a cohesive Asean community.

Trade and cultural ties could be just as effective in fostering greater Asean solidarity, he said.

"We should therefore work together towards becoming economically and technologically a single community, that is, sharing our expertise, experiences and thoughts so that the benefits could be shared among us," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the making of an Asean community was a matter which must receive more attention and towards this end a variety of

PLEASE TURN TO  
PAGE 2, COL 1 ✓

# PM: Encourage exchange programmes

□ FROM PAGE ONE

programmes, both social and educational, should be developed to forge closer ties among the members.

He said this was especially important among the youth as they would carry on the tradition and give substance to the Asean spirit.

More exchange programmes among young people, he said, should be encouraged as this would provide them with a better insight into each other's way of life. In this context, Dr Mahathir said he was impressed with the ABF, which was created specifically as a private sector initiative and that for the past three years had been able to generate hundreds of millions of dollars as a result of new joint ventures among its members.

"This has definitely boosted intra-Asean trade," he said.

"As the private sector will always be the engine of

growth it is imperative that it continually initiates ideas, innovations and approaches which can be commercially developed for the mutual benefit of entrepreneurs and consumers in the Asean region," he said.

The Governments, he said, could provide the necessary political, security and infrastructure framework, but eventually it was the businessmen who had to exploit the commercial opportunities that abounded in this region.

Dr Mahathir was also pleased to note that there were more than 40 Malaysian companies which are members of the ABF.

The Prime Minister said he found it refreshing that the forum, despite the emphasis on business activities, had included outstanding pre-university students at each of its annual banquets. The ABF spends RM70,000 through its sponsors to bring 60 outstanding pre-university students

from member countries to the city here in conjunction with the presentation ceremony. This is to help motivate them in their future endeavours.

Dr Mahathir described the ABF's exercise to honour individuals from the various disciplines as a noble undertaking.

"That there is a group within Asean who are concerned with the young and who believes that students who excel in their respective discipline should be given regional and international recognition is indeed commendable. To provide motivation for the young to excel is one way to encourage professionalism."

He said their values had been their strength and as such, all possible measures must be taken to ensure these values were deeply ingrained in their society for generations to come.

"Without this strong sense of commitment to the community, family and na-

tion, our efforts to catch up with the developed nation will end in failure."

Dr Mahathir said that they should relentlessly help to upgrade the well-being of their families, communities and countries.

"Collectively, it will help to realise the Asean dream of a prosperous and peaceful Southeast Asia," he said.

ABF vice-president (Malaysia Chapter) Tan Sri Azman Hashim said the last several years had seen the favourable development of the business sector in Malaysia as well as in other economies of Asean.

This, he said, was in line with the rapid economic growth experienced by Asean.

"In Malaysia the real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the year 1988 to 1993 grew on an average by 8.8 per cent per annum.

He said Malaysia would be able to sustain above eight per cent growth this year and next year.

For the whole of Asean region, he said, real growth in 1993 was 6.9 per cent rising from six per cent the previous year and it was regarded as one of the fastest growing regions in the world.

"Despite the still sluggish growth in the industrial economies, real GDP growth in this region is expected to pick up further to 7.4 per cent this year."

ABF president Aburizal Bakrie said the ABF which started about three years ago now had 165 companies and countless individuals as members.

The main sponsors of today's event were Kuok Brothers Sdn Bhd, MB Finance Bhd and Arab-Malaysian Merchant Bank Bhd. Co sponsors are Hicom, Bakrie, Berjaya Group Bhd, Bolton Properties Bhd, New Straits Times Press (M) Bhd, Master-Carriage (M) Sdn Bhd, Telekom Malaysia, Sempati Air, Thai Air and Royal Brunei.