

Dr M: Create a zone of peace and prosperity

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia yesterday called for an East Asian zone of peace, stability and prosperity while reminding countries in the region not to forget the poor.

"There can be no resting on our laurels. A vast proportion of our peoples are still poor," said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

To the poor, he said, economic growth rates were irrelevant as they had no share in them.

Opening the first East Asian Young Leaders Congress, Dr Mahathir advocated an East Asian zone of peace, stability and prosperity modelled along the lines of Asean.

He said Asean could be a base and an example for

a much wider East Asian co-operation.

"If we can achieve it, we may change the course of history, or directly, the future of more than a quarter of mankind in the east, and, indirectly, the destiny of mankind."

He said building an East Asian region of peace did not mean turning away from other interests or other regions.

"Indeed we cannot do so, for all of us are trading nations. We need the rest of the world. The richer they are the better customers they will be," he said.

While countries in the region pursued these ends, he said they should ensure they were not con-

frontationist or bullied.

"(We must also ensure) we do not damage Asean, Apec and other established processes; we should not allow others to divide the Pacific or East Asia; we must not be cowed from speaking out against racism, exclusivity and attempts to create closed trading blocs."

Dr Mahathir said East Asia would be the primary source of tomorrow's growth and dynamism.

He said it was important for East Asian states to actively promote peace with each other.

Organised by Umno Youth, the eight-day meeting is being attended by 165 participants from 13 East Asian countries.