

PM: South countries must be united to be heard

By K.P. Waran

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the lack of co-ordination and co-operation among developing countries has prevented them from having their views on matters affecting their livelihood and future heard or considered.

The Prime Minister said this had also encouraged some developed countries to try and impose conditionalities on trade and exports on the developing countries.

Against this background, the developing countries must put up a united front to influence trade policies and the World Trade Organisation to counter the obstacles and conditions laid down by developed nations, Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister said admittedly the developing nations' clout would not be very powerful but it would be better than no clout at all.

"Working alone and in isolation will get us nowhere," he said in his keynote address at the United Nations Development Programme meeting on regional development co-operation in Asia and the Pacific at the KL Hilton here today.

About 200 delegates including senior development planners, UN officials and representatives from multilateral development banks

are discussing a wide spectrum of development issues and new opportunities for regional co-operation during the three-day meeting which began yesterday.

He said even though developing countries were able to put their act together and really make democracy and the administration work, they still would not be able to resolve the poverty and development problems if they did not co-operate with each other.

"This is because developed nations are all ganging up and forming all kinds of blocs. Although they may insist that they do not mean to be exclusive, the fact remains that they have a tendency to jointly act against our economic interests if we do not conform or do what we are told.

"Mention has already been made about their insistence on linking trade with human rights, workers' wages and environmental issues.

"It is reasonable to expect everyone to be concerned with these issues. But what is worrisome is that the linkages invariably affect our competitiveness.

"It would seem that developed nations were more interested in pushing up developing nations' cost than in seeing that our people and our workers are free, and our environment well-preserved," he said.

He said those countries which were colonies of developed nations remember how the people were fully exploited and pristine forests razed to the ground to make way for plantations

FULL TEXT ON P12

MORE REPORTS: P2

PLEASE TURN TO
PAGE 2, COL 6

Developing countries 'frustrated by export conditions'

□ FROM PAGE ONE

and the extraction of minerals.

He stressed that while developing countries did not object to what was reasonable and fair, the problem was that they were unable to have their views heard, much less considered.

Dr Mahathir said some developing countries had now turned to manufacturing, particularly labour- and resource-intensive industries, in order to benefit from lower cost of living and resources but they were being frustrated by conditionalities imposed on exports, including barriers such as eco-labelling.

He said with the growing euphoria over the predicted Pacific Century presaged by the achievements of many East Asian economies, many had expected the developing countries of the Asia and Pacific region to reap fully the dividends of peace but instead were now being made to pay a heavy premium.

He said the developed North had invented and imposed all kinds of conditions including linkages with human rights, labour rights, environmental restrictions, access to markets and an anarchic regime in the exchange rate of currencies.

"Every move by the North to protect their interests invariably results in the poor countries becoming poorer. The rich man's club not only disregards the interest of the poor but positively refuses to hear their views before damaging decisions are made," he said.

He said the countries of Asia and the Pacific must tread the path of responsible development and not be misled by the pressures exerted by the fads and fashions of environmental movements and economic lobby groups.

"We must determine our own national and regional priorities on the basis of our own circumstances. We must recognise that economic sustainability through responsible development does not only refer to issues related to the preservation of the environment.

"It includes other elements like social justice, the right to development and wealth and an equitable world society," he said.

He said the road to responsible development was fraught with problems and uncertainties and multi-lateral development institutions must play the role of honest broker, matching universal principles and priorities with local circumstances.

He added that it was imperative these institutions did not take a slanted view of development as prescribed by Western pundits and instead initiate collaborative approaches with the developing countries.