

Emerging consensus in region towards openness

By S. Jayakrishnan

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today there was an emerging consensus among most countries in the region towards open regionalism and as such the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) proposal should be viewed positively.

"Open regionalism will not result in trade blocs. The Asean proposal for an East Asia Economic Caucus should therefore be viewed positively.

"EAEC is not exclusionist. EAEC is a caucus within Apec just like Nafta can be viewed as also a caucus within Apec.

"Hence, there is nothing to fear from the EAEC. EAEC is intended to promote open regionalism and will be transparent."

Dr Mahathir said Southeast Asia was different from Northeast Asia and yet they shared some common values.

"The bottomline is our collective willingness to find common ground so that we can move in one direction towards the 21st century.

"The one idea that has taken root in most of the region is the emerging consensus towards open regionalism," he said in a keynote address at the opening of the 4th Asia-Pacific management consultants conference at Istana Hotel here.

The three-day conference, which is being held for the first time in Malaysia, is organised by the Institute of Management Consultants (IMC) Malaysia and managed by Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute Dr Mahathir is an Honorary Fellow of IMC Malaysia.

The theme of the conference is "Towards the Asia-Pacific century: New challenges and new horizons in a new era".

Also present were Datuk Paduka Saleha Mohd Ali, the president of the IMC Malaysia, Walter E. Vieira, the secretary-general of the International Council of Management Consulting Institutes, Dr Bernard Wang, the chairman of the organising committee, and Richard Elliott, the president of the Institute of Management Consultants Australia.

Dr Mahathir hoped the conference could also look into the challenges, merits and prospects arising from the EAEC.

He said the 21st century was the Asia-Pacific Century and much had been written and spoken about the dynamism of the Pacific Rim and the opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region.

"We already know that the Asia-Pacific region accounts for 25 per cent of the world's Gross Domestic Product today and it will be the fastest growing region in the world by the 21st century.

"What needs to be stressed is that the Asia-Pacific region is not homogeneous."

Dr Mahathir said it was fortunate that despite having a multi-racial and multi-cultural society, Malaysia

PLEASE TURN TO
PAGE 3, COL 1

Our progress is result of hard work, says Dr M

□ FROM PAGE ONE

remained peaceful and stable.

He said the Government would continue to maintain the stable political climate as it continues to march confidently towards the 21st century.

"We remain clear in our shared vision. We have common goals and common aspirations to become a fully-developed and industrialised nation by the year 2020.

"Anything can happen in 25 years to derail us, but we are going to try very hard."

Dr Mahathir said that although there must have been elements of good luck, Malaysia's progress was achieved through much hard work, pragmatism and a commitment to long-term planning.

He added there was no mystery involved as the Government did the obvious.

Dr Mahathir said the Government recognised very early the vital importance of the role of the private sector.

"Our National Economic Policy was therefore business-friendly and market-driven as it is premised on dividing a growing economic cake.

"Secondly, we believe in power-sharing between the various races in the country. Thirdly, we believe in *musyawarah* and *muafakat*,

the principles of consultation and consensus."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians had a taste of the results of racial confrontation in 1969 and had never been anxious to resort to that approach since.

He also called on the conference participants, who comprise management experts from around the world, to look at the Malaysian experience for comparison purposes as there might be something to learn from it.

Dr Mahathir also hoped that the foreign experts present at the conference would be able to share their knowledge, experience and technology with Malaysians as everyone would benefit from these exchanges.

"One of the reasons for the Look East Policy is to learn the management methods of the successful countries of the East. But it would be shortsighted to disregard the West.

"There are positive aspects in the West and the East and Malaysia wishes to combine the two."

Dr Mahathir said he was confident that Malaysian managers would be able to rise to the challenges of the future.

He added that there was a vital need to upgrade the country's managerial capabilities to face the strategic management challenges in the 21st century.