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Dr M: Forced partnerships far from smart

ullah; Ramlan Said; Sharanjit Singh; Zuraimi Abdullah; Elizabeth John DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad attributed the conflict between nations today to a forced partnership which was far from smart.

The Prime Minister said that the big powers took almost everything for themselves and denied smaller nations a fair share of power or responsibility or returns in whatever form.

He said the World Trade Organisation was a case in point.

In his keynote address when opening the Langkawi International Dialogue, Dr Mahathir said:

"Whatever competitive advantage the developing countries may have is considered as unfair and illegitimate. Thus now labour costs, natural resources and stable Governments are all considered as wrong or improper or unacceptable.

"But the competitive advantage of the powerful nations are all considered as legitimate, fair and proper. It is regarded as fair and proper for the powerful corporations and banks of the developed nations to compete with the puny industries and banks of the poor, developing countries.

"The poor countries must open up their markets to the rich because the rich are prepared to open up their markets to the poor. That the poor countries have no products to sell to the rich, nor banks nor industries to take advantage of the markets of the rich is considered as irrelevant.

"What is important is that the rich are offering the same things that they expect the poor to offer. And that, of course, is interpreted by the rich and the powerful as being fair. It is the gesture that counts, not the actual result.

"Smart partnership between nations must take into consideration the relative strength and weakness of the partners.

"It actually pays to give a handicap to the poorer partner, as for example through the Generalised System of Preferences, for, by so doing you will be hastening the process of their graduation to non-GSP status.

"And of course when they graduate they would have achieved a certain degree of development which will make them a good market for the rich... smart partnership is for long-term results.

"Partnerships which are based on immediate sharing of the spoils cannot be considered as smart. Such partnerships are likely to result in dissatisfaction once the immediate benefits wear off as they are bound to wear off."

(END)