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Grouping 'in unique position' to help

A. Kadir Jasin; Syed Nadzri in Edinburgh

COUNTRIES of the Commonwealth are in a unique position to help each other achieve development and wealth, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

This is because no group of countries in the world enjoys such a wealth of common features, he said in his speech at the first executive session of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting yesterday.

"Firstly, we all understand a common language - English. We know very well how important a common language is in business. We obviously have a decided advantage.

"Secondly, despite the adoption of different ideologies and systems, the administrative machinery has always been modelled after the same British model.

"The laws are also similar, being based on British Common Laws," he added.

Dr Mahathir, however, said despite all these positive features in favour of it, the members of the Commonwealth have not really gained much from the organisation.

"We can only blame ourselves for this," he noted.

But in the last two or three years, he said, several countries of the Commonwealth together with non-Commonwealth countries decided to explore new ways of co-operating between countries for growth.

He said instead of aid and loans, it was decided that there should be partnerships involving the government and the private sector, together with foreign investors.

"Such a partnership should benefit all the partners evenly. It should involve true participation by all according to the area of expertise or resource that each has.

"Thus, while one country may play the host and supply the workforce, another would supply the expertise and management and the third the capital. The objective is to enable the host country to develop the knowhow and to be able to set up and manage similar enterprises on their own later," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Commonwealth could certainly do a lot to make a success of the smart partnerships proposed by the Langkawi International Dialogue, the South African International Dialogue and the Barbados International Dialogue.

"All the while it should be remembered that the partnerships is an equal partnership between parties which are not equal. The interest of the weakest partner must be given special consideration even though the commercial viability and profitability must be maintained," he added.

The Prime Minister said the Commonwealth may soon find that membership of the organisation would be considered less important than the membership of the world community.

"The non-Commonwealth powers are not going to allow exclusivity within the Commonwealth. They see wealth to be exploited in the Commonwealth. And they are not going to be kept out simply because they are not members of the club," he added.

Dr Mahathir said it was imperative therefore that member countries understood what was in the offing.

"We can choose to struggle alone against overwhelming odds or to stay together as a Commonwealth and try to bring about some order to the

globalised world that is being touted by those with much to gain," he noted.

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