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PM: South must foster solidarity

A. Kadir Jasin in Havana

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who on Friday was awarded Cuba's highest award, has called on developing countries to foster solidarity.

Only by doing so could they hope to successfully confront the rapidly changing circumstances brought about by globalisation and liberalisation of the economy.

Speaking at the ceremony where he received the Order of Jose Marti award from President Fidel Castro, Dr Mahathir said the task of national development was daunting for developing countries.

"We are confronted with rapidly changing circumstances in which the global, political and economic environments are seldom sensitive to our particular needs and interests.

"With the trend towards globalisation and liberalisation of the world economy gaining momentum, we have to learn not only to adapt to such developments but also to deal with the imposition of the ever-increasing conditionalities by those in position of power and influence in the international arena.

"The rich and powerful continue to dictate and to seek control."

The Order of Jose Marti is named after Cuban revolutionary leader Jose Marti, who died fighting the Spaniards in 1895 at the age of 42. The award is given to foreign leaders of distinction.

According to the citation read out at the ceremony, Dr Mahathir was given the honour as a recognition of his statesmanship and for dedicating his life to ensuring the well-being of his people, and for upholding ideas that made him transcend the borders of his own country.

It recognised his role in strengthening unity among Southeast Asian nations, for developing co-operation among countries of the South, and for forging a common front against political, economic and cultural hegemonies.

The ceremony was held at the Revolution Palace, the office of the Cuban President.

Dr Mahathir said weak nations were almost helpless in turning the tide individually. He went on to urge nations which were victims of such policies to foster solidarity in order to be able to use their collective weight to wrest the right to influence policies and decisions that affected them profoundly.

He cited how currency manipulators had brought about disastrous consequences to the economies of Southeast Asian countries by wiping out decades of hard work by their peoples.

"The South must therefore stand together in a strong united front. I believe that wherever possible, in the Non-Aligned Movement and in the United Nations, we must speak out against such injustices.

"Developing countries must not be dictated to. The goal-post must not be allowed to be changed every time to the advantage of the rich and powerful."

He thanked his host for the honour and recognition and went on to express the hope of welcoming the Cuban President in Malaysia.

Present at the ceremony were Malaysian Ministers, officials and members of the business delegation, Cuban Ministers and representatives of foreign Governments in Cuba.

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