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Time to recognise our way

AS A developing country, Malaysia owes a debt to many richer countries that have been kind enough to provide it aid and technical assistance. It has benefited under various schemes including the Official Development Assistance, the Generalised System of Preferences, grants and loans from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and various governments of donor countries. Today, while Malaysia is still officially regarded as a developing country, much of the aid it should be enjoying for several more years has been discontinued. Some say it is a price it has to pay for growing too fast.

Based on its Vision 2020, the country does not expect to join the ranks of Japan, the US, the UK, to name some of the countries that have provided it with aid, for another 23 years. But already, Malaysia is now providing its own technical assistance to poorer countries all over the world. It is also encouraging them to put down the begging bowl and start trading with one another and investing in each other's country as a means to accumulate and share wealth. It has done this successfully through the Group of Fifteen (G-15), where its Bilateral Payments Arrangement (BPA), which is a credit arrangement to guarantee payment for exports in the South, has given South-South trade a boost and a reason for hope. Malaysia has also made credit arrangements to facilitate imports of its palm oil, a move that irked the IMF recently. Malaysia also has a very big assistance programme which has helped many developing countries from the Pacific Islands to Africa. Assistance includes administration on democracy, how to administer a free market economy and how to provide a bigger framework for investment by foreign investors.

Malaysia has also, with the support of like-minded governments in the South, pumped money to build a network for the private sector in developing countries. Today, the South Investment, Trade and Technology Data Exchange Centre has linked thousands of companies throughout the South. The Government's relentless campaign to encourage local investors to diversify trade and investment away from traditional markets to the developing countries of Asia, Latin America, Africa and eastern Europe has borne incredible results. Malaysia has even inspired several African countries to organise the equivalent of its Langkawi International Dialogue, to be held next month in Botswana, where the virtues of Malaysia Incand Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's "win-win-win" principle will be extolled. In a number of countries, the Government has seconded experts to help run central banks, investment authorities and economic schemes.

Not once has the Malaysian Government tried to dictate terms to those countries it is helping, or to those foreign governments seeking the expertise of Malaysian bureaucrats. When the Government of an Indochinese country with substantial Malaysian investments threatened to nullify a major project in that country recently, the Government did not retaliate by issuing statements to threaten to pull out its investments. When Malaysian logging companies were treated like dirt in several countries in the Pacific and Latin America, the Government did not pressure their governments to leave the Malaysian companies alone. When the court of a neighbouring country nullified a major hotel deal involving Malaysian buyers, the Government did not shout threats of trade sanctions.

Instead the Government has constantly reminded its companies to ensure

that they conform to the rules of their host countries, no matter how backward the economies of these countries are compared with Malaysia. The Government has never imposed conditions on poorer countries in Africa and Latin America seeking technical assistance or credit arrangements. It has every right, therefore, to question the sincerity of countries that impose conditions on, issue threats to, and apply pressure on aid-recipient countries. Maybe, it's about time the Malaysian way of doing things is given due recognition.

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