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`Commonwealth can help'

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The Commonwealth can play an important role in helping member states mould the new borderless global world, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said member countries could work together to ensure that developing nations become full participants at international economic discussions, which shape and influence the rules and laws of a globalised world.

The Commonwealth groups ex-colonies of the British Empire.

"It could also promote policies that help close the digital gap between the poor and rich countries so that knowledge can truly work for enriching everyone, rich and poor," he told participants at international meeting organised by the Royal Commonwealth Society at the Commonwealth Club.

Also present were RCS chairman Sir Michael McWilliam and RCS Malaysia president Datuk Muhammad Feisol Hassan.

The RCS is an international non-governmental organisation working to promote knowledge of the Commonwealth. It is supported by 35 affiliated organisations worldwide with an international headquarters in London.

The Prime Minister said the 54-nation grouping should insist on playing a meaningful role in world affairs. "I have faith that if we stay united, the grouping will continue to be significant as a role model of North-South co-operation for mutual benefit."

Describing the Commonwealth as a unique group of nations, Dr Mahathir said it must ensure that its members were adequately equipped to handle new challenges, for example globalisation.

He said the greatest challenge was to ensure that this process did not benefit only a few, while marginalising or impoverishing a large number of developing countries, which are constrained by lack of capital, institutional capacities and physical infrastructure.

"They are, therefore, unable to fully seize the opportunities presented by globalisation. The developed countries have been more successful in integrating themselves into the global economy and reaping the benefits.

"In this respect, the more developed members of the Commonwealth should assist developing member countries to build their capacity to deal with the new global environment."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia believed relations among States should be based on equal sovereignty and respect for everyone's interests and benefits.

Speaking to reporters later, he said developed members of the Commonwealth could assist less-developed countries in facing new challenges by providing equipment and training.

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