

*Push for fairer distribution of wealth, **says** PM*

By MAZWIN NIK ANIS

SINGAPORE: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called for a fairer distribution of wealth and urged Asean countries to formulate ideas that can shape a more equitable world.

The Prime Minister, in his acceptance speech after receiving the Asean Achievement Millennium Award here last night said so far, ideas were mostly originated by the rich West.

Calling himself a "universal recalcitrant," Dr Mahathir said the time had come for the poorer nations, Asean countries for example, to come up with ideas on how wealth could be distributed fairer.

"The world is rich in resources, human and material, hence there is no reason why any country should be poor. It is entirely possible for wealth to be more fairly distributed.

"At present, the globalised borderless world with its huge free market is benefit-

ing only a select few, rich people with capital to take advantage of the borderless world.

"So far, ideas about the shape of things to come have originated from the rich West. It is time we find ways to shape a more equitable world. Taxing the rich international businesses can be one such idea.

"I hope Asean countries will dare advocate this idea. Clearly, the rich will not lose by paying for development of the poor as they will certainly get back their money many times over," he added.

Dr Mahathir was honoured with the award by the Asean Business Forum for turning Malaysia into an exemplary and dynamic nation. The other recipient of the award is the republic's Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew.

Also present at the dinner were Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman

and National Economic Action Council executive director Datuk Mustapha Mohamed.

Dr Mahathir, who is known for being vocal in reflecting his views, said if Asean was to be meaningful, it must look after the interest of all its members.

He also said that Asean countries must come together to negotiate the demand for a new round of World Trade Organisation talks but there must first be consensus among the group's members on the need to review the agreements reached at the first WTO.

"The effect on all countries, rich and poor must be fully understood and assessed before any support can be given to the formulation of a new international trade and investment regime.

"Nowhere should the Asean countries be more united than in negotiations for a new world economic order as will happen at the WTO," he added.