

Dr M: We live under great pressure

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LONDON: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has taken to task certain powerful western countries for what he described as practising a modern-day version of gunboat diplomacy against Third World nations.

Some countries had even argued that they had a right to interfere in the internal affairs of other nations, the Prime Minister told some 600 Malaysian students at a dialogue at Imperial College in South Kensington on Sunday.

He said Malaysia and the developing world were under great pressure to conform to norms set by the powerful countries, such as on human

rights, rule of law and corporate governance.

Failure to conform to these "correct practices" governing the globalised world, for which the developing countries had no say, could lead to sanctions and other punitive action, he said, adding that "we live in very troublesome times."

Dr Mahathir said the surest way to safeguard Malaysia's independence was to have political stability and a well-managed economy because a debt-ridden country would be beholden to powerful international agencies such as the International Monetary Fund.

"Today, we are struggling

to maintain our independence ... (because) ... we are under (constant) pressure to conform to (so-called) correct practices governing the globalised world, for which we have no say," he said.

"But we are better off than most developing countries. We can (therefore) speak our mind. We must (always) remain masters of our own destiny," he added.

Dr Mahathir urged the students to be alert to these global issues and not allow the political stability in Malaysia to be undermined.

He said Malaysia was able to surmount difficult social, religious and political chal-

lenges because "we are prepared to be sensitive to each other's sensitivities."

As a result, Malaysia today was more stable than before May 1969 (when racial strife broke out) because the country had been able to spend more time on development rather than on having to overcome problems inherent in a multi-racial society, he added.

Dr Mahathir put it down to the success of power-sharing among the various races, pointing out that at no time in the country's history had any ethnic group been excluded in the coalition government in place since Independence.