

# Unite, Dr M tells weak nations

STAR 20 AUG 2002

By M. VEERA PANDIYAN

YANGON: The only hope for weak nations of the world to protect themselves from "economic predators" is to come together and combine their small assets, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said the hope lay in stronger links between countries within a region, between regions and through co-operation that did not diminish national identities but endowed countries with greater strength through combined economic and political might.

"We should note that even the strong are coming together to bolster themselves even more. It is not easy for them and it will certainly not be easy for us."

"But we have no choice but to try and try," he said in a keynote address at the Myanmar-Malaysia Technology Conference here yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said Asean, in spite of its weaknesses, was still one of the strongest associations of developing countries.

He noted that member countries had reduced the kind of fruitless confrontations that normally happened between neighbours.

"We have also learnt from each other, the art and science of developing our countries.

"We have strengthened

our economies through the promotion of **intra-Asean** trade and investments and through regional collaboration to protect our industries and we have helped our common industries through policies and strategies," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia believed in helping neighbours to develop, "part-

ly to save us from the spillover effects of poor and unstable governments and partly because prosperous neighbours made good markets."

"It is also because we do honestly want to see our region become prosperous and strong in order to help us fend off the predators from

outside.

"We do not subscribe to the zero-sum game in which one country can only grow if another loses.

"Malaysia believes in a win-win philosophy in which both parties or all parties must gain and no one should lose. This is, believe it or not, entirely possible," he added.

The Prime Minister said it was this in mind that Malaysia had worked closely with all its neighbours and in particular newer members, who because of their costly past struggles, were still lagging behind.

He said Malaysia's experience in growing through foreign participation in the

economy could also be the experience of all countries wishing to grow economically.

"We know that foreign investments will not affect our independence. Malaysia has always remained independent in word and deed."

Earlier, he said that with faster travel and better communication, distance had become less of an obstacle nowadays.

"Jet speed has made every part of the world just a day away."

He said opportunities for interaction had never been as great or as easy as in modern times and such interactions should be used to help foster productive relations between peoples.

"But unfortunately, some see these opportunities as offering them the expansion of their influence and their might, of hegemony in a world that has become a village," he said.

"The mentality of the village bully has overcome these people.

"Invariably, in such a world, might is right, more so than ever.

"And when might is right, justice and fair play go out the window."

Dr Mahathir returned home last night after the two-day visit to Myanmar. Several Cabinet ministers were at the Royal Malaysian Air Force base in Subang to receive the prime minister.