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Dr M to voice developing nations' concerns

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will highlight the views and concerns of developing countries during the "enlarged dialogue" with leaders of the Group of Eight (G8) in Evian, France.

"If we cease to talk, we will not be heard. We will not be able to influence unless we talk about it," Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said.

Dr Mahathir, as chairman of the 116-member Non-Aligned Movement will certainly speak up for developing countries.

He is expected to point out that the decisions and actions of the G8 have an impact on poor and emerging economies.

The G8 which groups Germany, Canada, the United States, France, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and Russia account for some 60 per cent of global gross domestic product.

This will be the first time the leaders of several developing countries come face to face with those from the world's most industrialised countries since the invasion of Iraq.

It is also the first time that the proponents (the US and Britain) and the opponents to the invasion - France, Germany and Russia - sit at the same table.

In addition to the trans-Atlantic tension and rift, there are growing concerns about the world economy, deflationary pressures, growing threat of terrorism and the impact on developing countries.

In an increasingly globalised and interdependent world, the concerns and plight of the developing world have to be considered by the eight most developed nations.

These include trade and development and the Doha Development Agenda, debt relief, poverty and diseases including HIV/AIDS.

The enlarged dialogue initiated by the French President Jacques Chirac is to foster "an open discussion on globalisation and world governance".

Terrorism and the need to deal with the growing threat is also high on the list of issues for discussions.

The revival of the world economy and the need to restore confidence has been stressed by the host.

French officials say that the meeting in the scenic French Alps and on the shores of Lake Geneva hopes to deliver a strong message of unity, solidarity, security, growth and stability.

Meanwhile, Syed Hamid, in briefing the Malaysian Press, said South African President Thabo Mbeki agreed with Dr Mahathir that views of developing countries needed to be aired.

Mbeki, who held bilateral discussions with Dr Mahathir, is expected to touch on peace and security during the dialogue.

Syed Hamid said discussions would be free flowing and could cover a whole range of trade, economic, health, terrorism and the post-Iraq environment.

Trade, development and the Doha Development Round are important issues and of special interest to emerging economies. Developing countries are expected to tell the world's most industrialised nations that trade barriers on products from developing countries need to be dropped in an effort to lift millions out of poverty.

Tariff and non-tariff barriers on exports from developing countries to developed markets hinder growth and progress of emerging economies and

their people.

The Doha process, which was heralded as the "global development round" and which promised to tackle issues of importance to developing countries, is in danger of being stalled mainly due to the policies and attitude of rich countries.

The March 31 deadline for framework for agriculture negotiations was missed as was the deadline for trade-related intellectual property rights.

Developed countries, the United States and Europe, have in fact increased subsidies to their farm sector.

The World Bank points out that the US\$350 billion (RM1.33 triliion) in agriculture subsidies a year dwarf the US\$50 billion in development aid that the developed world provides to poor countries annually.

In addition, US production subsidies and price support which encourage American farmers to overproduce and dump excess supply on world market also inflicts tremendous harm to the poor.

In addition to participating in the enlarged dialogue, Dr Mahathir will hold bilateral discussions with Chirac, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Hu Jintao.

Others invited to the enlarged dialogue include Egyptian President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, President of Algeria Abdelaziz Bouteflika, President of Nigeria Olusegun Obasanjo, King Mohammed VI of Morocco as chairman of G77, President of Senegal Abdoulaye Wade, President of Mexico Vicente Fox Quesada, President of Switzwerland Pascal Couchepin, President of Brazil Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Abdullah Ibn Abdul Aziz Al Saud and the Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The G8 leaders will also have a separate meeting with NEPAD members - Egypt, Algeria, Nigeria, South Africa and Senegal.