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Dr M: Close the gap

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"WE have made a mess of the world," Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad forthrightly told the plenary session of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland yesterday.

"Two millenniums of experience and mountains of knowledge have not made us much more capable at managing our affairs than stone-age people."

Speaking to participants at the forum's plenary session in the Swiss Alps, Dr Mahathir said the world had become small as a "global village".

But "we have not made much progress in the management of our world despite its diminished 'size'.

"Just as in the Stone Age the man with the biggest club ruled, in our modern and sophisticated global village the country with the biggest 'killing power' rules."

The theme of Dr Mahathir's address was Trust and Governance for a New Era.

Others in the plenary session were Republican senator Robert Portman from Ohio, United States; Lord Carey of Clifton, former Archbishop of Canterbury, Britain; Charles Holliday Jr, chairman and CEO of DuPont, and Kenneth Roth, executive director, Human Rights Watch.

The session was chaired by David Gergen, currently editor-at-large, US News & World Report.

Dr Mahathir said when the Cold War ended the thinking was that the world would see peace and prosperity. After all, the Evil Empire had been overthrown and those who believed in peace and universal justice had won. "But the loss of counter-balance has resulted in the great exponent of justice and fair play itself to become unbalanced.

"Now there is no more other side. The friendly face of capitalism is not needed any more. Now capitalists can do what they like and what they like is simply to make more money for themselves."

Dr Mahathir stressed that the world had become too small to be divided into countries with different systems of Government and laws. "There should be just one global entity and one system, the great democratic system and the freedom that is supposed to go with it.

"If the new democracies do not know how to manage the system it is too bad. Democracy is such a good system that everyone must adopt it at all costs. It is blasphemy to say anything against democracy. If you do, if you resist, then you will be considered a heretic and starved to death, or bombed out of existence."

The Prime Minister said in a free world there must be competition. The strongest and most efficient will win. "Big is beautiful again. Big is good. But, unfortunately, there is no guarantee that the big will not cheat, will not fail, will not go bankrupt.

"The world should not take notice of Enron, Global Crossing, Arthur Anderson, United Airlines etc. They are the exceptions that merely prove the rule."

"There is a wave of banks and corporations merging and acquiring each other to ensure that the tiny banks and businesses in poor countries will not stand a chance, will be swept aside.

"Disparity between the rich and poor has increased. The richest countries have per capita income of more than US\$30,000 (RM114,000), the poorest US\$300. Of the six billion people in the world one billion are underfed, underclothed and without a roof over their heads. Many scrounge

in rubbish heaps for food, clothing and materials for their shelter.

"In politics, the post-Cold War world is no better. The misfortunes of the weak are their problem. The strong will dominate. Socially, the world has not advanced either. There is a lot of talk of the sanctity of human lives and human rights. We are opposed to the death penalty."

Dr Mahathir pointed out that whole populations have been sentenced to death and, in many instances, the death sentence has been carried out. "When war is declared against a country a death sentence is passed on the people, and when war is executed the sentence is carried out. And yet we talk glibly about the sanctity of life."

But, "the worm finally turned. The weak have now hit back."