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Dr M: Economic sanctions are acts of war

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'CRIPPLING': Embargoes often used by major powers to bully others, says ex-PM

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FORMER prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday called for economic sanctions to be seen as acts of war, saying that trade or economic embargoes were often used by major powers to bully smaller countries.

He said the imposition of sanctions had the same effect on countries as war, by crippling their economies and causing shortages of food, medical supplies and other necessities.

"This is bullying and is a new way to wage war against others. We cannot impose sanctions on another country and impoverish their people to force them to submit to us," he said at a lecture here held in conjunction with the 40th anniversary of bilateral relations between Malaysia and Cuba.

Dr Mahathir, who is Perdana Global Peace Foundation patron, said the foundation was ready to work with other organisations, such as the International Movement for a Just World (IJM), on an international campaign to declare such sanctions illegal.

He was commenting on a question posed by IJM president Dr Chandra Muzaffar on the United States' continued trade embargo against Cuba, despite the restoration of full diplomatic relations in December.

Dr Mahathir said the embargo had done little to change Cuba's Communist regime, and accused the US government of practising double standards when criticising Cuba's human rights record.

The US, he said, should not be taking the moral high ground, citing a recently re-

leased report which detailed numerous human rights abuses committed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), including the torture of US war prisoners.

"It was legal (for the US) to torture people — I don't know if that conforms to our ideas of human rights. I'm not anti-American. But to take the moral high ground and tell people that their human rights record is bad, when they should look at their own record and find that (their record) is worse. It's not proper."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia's human rights record had also come under fire from the US, alluding to arrests made under the Internal Security Act during his tenure as prime minister.

"Of course my record is bad, and I accept that my record is bad. But theirs (the US) is worse," he said.

"We (detain) people for two years, but the US keeps people for more than 10 years at Guantanamo Bay (a US detention facility in Cuba). Why Guantanamo? Because they say Cuba allows detention without trial.

"The prisoners are there for years without trial and may have been tortured, but somehow that is seen as all right. I don't think people should take it upon themselves to tell others how to behave or how to run their countries."

Dr Mahathir also responded to a question comparing his opposition against DAP, which has been accused of being a Communist party, with his efforts to maintain friendly relations with Cuba's Communist regime.

He said he did not believe DAP was a Communist party, although he disagreed with many of the party's ideas on how to run the country.

He described DAP adviser Lim Kit Siang as an "authoritarian" and accused him of fostering a family legacy at the party's top levels.

"I don't think Lim is a communist, but he is inclined to be authoritarian and wants to be succeeded by his son. I don't believe in a system where the family counts more than the nation."