

A challenge to New World Order

By THALIF DEEN in New York

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WHILE they agree the world may be ripe for "a new world order", many from the Third World are questioning the right of Western states to formulate and impose this order on the international community.

Observing that the US is taking the lead in defining the proposed new order, Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has warned that Western nations do not have the moral or legitimate right to do so.

Addressing the UN general assembly last month, Dr Mahathir said "a few nations on their own have taken it upon themselves to determine the new world order, (but) how can we be assured that a new world order formulated by any one country or group of countries will be good for everyone?"

The proposed new order in the post-Cold War era was a recurring theme reflected in the general assembly speeches of others, including China, Venezuela and Ghana.

Ghana's Secretary for Foreign Affairs Obed Y. Asamoah said "the new world order does not call for the capitulation of the Third World to any superpower even in a unipolar world."

He added that "the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) has no room for those who covet the distinction of being wards of superpowers."

As the world moves towards the 21st century, said China's Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, the people of all countries are confronted with the question, "where is our world going and what kind of a new international order should be established?"

Sovereignty

Any proposed new international order, he noted, should conform to the principles and purposes of only one institution: the UN and its charter.

Emphasising that the assembly was meeting at a time when a new international order was being defined, Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez told delegates that the importance of such an exceptional time must not be weakened or tarnished.

"Let us move now from East-West confrontation to a North-South dialogue that will lead to a single united world," he said, calling on the US and Cuba to end their confrontation which began in the context of the Cold War.

"Let us have confidence that Cuba will open itself to the universal concept of democracy as we would all wish, and that the US will open a

dialogue that puts an end to sanctions that have lost all justification and validity," he told the assembly.

Speakers pointed out that if the new world order is to be accepted by the international community, countries should respect each other's sovereignty, treat each other as equals and try to seek common ground while putting aside differences.

As Dr Mahathir told the assembly, "if democracy is to be the only acceptable system of government within states, shouldn't there be also democracy between the states of the world?"

"In the UN, we are equal, but five are more equal than the rest of the 166," he said referring to the veto powers of Britain, France, China, the US and the Soviet Union — the five permanent members of the Security Council.

Clearly, the states of the world are not equal — not in the UN, not anywhere, he added.

Third World states also say there needs to be an end to the arms race in the new world order, as well as the reduction and elimination of all weapons of mass destruction.

Economy

Dr Mahathir told the assembly that the UN, which is playing the role of inspector in Iraq, should extend that role to overseeing "the destruction of all nuclear weapons everywhere."

This will include the world's five major nuclear powers — the permanent members of the Security Council — and countries such as Israel and South Africa, believed to possess nuclear weapons.

It is also felt that the proposed new world order should end the widening gap between North and South.

The Chinese foreign minister said it is necessary to establish, step by step, a new international economic order.

Ghana's foreign affairs secretary was more explicit: "The 85 per cent of the world's population who live on 30 per cent of the world's income are not asking for charity."

In a new world order, he said, developing nations should seek better prices for their commodity exports, favourable terms of trade, low interest rates and a reduction of debt burdens.

"Although the ending of the Cold War has benefited peace all over the world," he argued, "much remains to be done to secure this peace."

— Inter Press Service