

Mahathir pursues UN council membership issue

By LIM HOCK CHYE

NEW YORK: When Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad finished his speech at the United Nations last Friday, many delegates stung by his blistering attack on the West's double standards over major world issues were glad it was over.

But if they thought that the Malaysian leader, having said his piece, would focus his attention on other less controversial matters, they had better think again.

The Prime Minister did not let them off the hook that easily. At a press conference after his speech, he vowed: "If I have to say this every year or two years once, I will still repeat it if it is still relevant."

Seen as one of the most articulate and outspoken of Third World leaders, Dr Mahathir received a standing ovation from the audience for speaking up against the West.

Some of the delegates, including one from a Western country, congratulated Dr Mahathir for speaking on their behalf.

Exposing Western hypocrisy and deceit does not endear Dr Mahathir to leaders of the developed countries and sparks fears among certain quarters of an economic backlash.

But Dr Mahathir will not be cowed. "Even if the benefit is minimal, the truth must be told some time," he said.

One major issue which Dr Mahathir keeps banging away at is the need to shake up the UN Security Council, which is now dominated by five permanent members.

"The UN Security Council must have more equitable representation and there should be no veto power," Dr Mahathir said.

The views of the weaker members must also be taken into consideration, especially when they are in the majority, he said.

The idea of a veto amplifies the dominant role of the permanent members of the Security Council, entrenching them as an exclusive group which has dominated the role of non-permanent members, a UN observer said.

The threat of a veto on recent occasions has been utilised to stymie worthwhile initiatives of other members of the Security Council.

As a result of the dramatic increase in UN membership over the past several years, the council is becoming less representative of the general membership.

Only eight per cent of the General Assembly is now represented by the council compared to 20 per cent in 1945.

The Security Council membership needs to be expanded to be more representative and in keeping with the significant increase in the membership of the United Nations to 184 members.

The issue of equitable representation in an expanded Security Council was first introduced to the agenda of the General Assembly at its 34th session 13 years ago.

All these years, there had never been any substantive debate on the issue.

The membership of the non-permanent members of the Security Council should be expanded to reflect equitable geographical representation, said the observer.

Malaysia, he said, feels that the membership of the council is inconsistent with Article 23, paragraph one of the Charter, which requires the council to consider, inter alia, equitable geographical distribution in the election of its non-permanent members which, as currently constituted, has too many from the European/Western groups, at the expense of other regions.

If the Security Council is to be the nucleus for a collective world authority, there must be a redefinition of what constitutes eligibility of a permanent membership in the future.

In this regard, the general mem-

bership of the United Nations will have to address two main questions:

● WHICH countries should be accepted as new permanent members among the new economic powers? and

● WHAT should be the basis and criteria of eligibility for countries in the South to be admitted as permanent members?

In considering the expansion of the membership of the Security Council, Malaysia has serious reservations about the idea of increasing the number of permanent members.

However, it is prepared to consider the idea of establishing a third category of membership as semi-permanent members, electable for a period of five to six years, without the veto right, the observer said.

In conclusion, he said Malaysia feels it is imperative for the Security Council, like other organs of the United Nations system, to adapt to changing circumstances to enhance its credibility, integrity, moral authority and overall responsibility.

The enlargement of the Security Council should also be accompanied by a close and objective scrutiny of the rules of procedures and functioning of the council itself to address some of the tendencies

and practices which run counter to the norms and principles of accountability, transparency and democracy.

Like a 48-year-old man, the United Nations has come a long way from its predecessor, the League of Nations, which was somewhat more homogeneous in the political character of its members, although it came to include the Soviet Union after 1933.

With the end of the Cold War and the rise of reform movements in the former Soviet Union and China, the United Nations has shed some of its former debility.

Francis Fukuyama, in his book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, says it is reasonable to question whether the United Nations will become the basis for a "new world order" in the next generation.

It will be 50 years old in 1995 and that occasion should manifest a qualitative change of the old UN to a new vibrant United Nations.

In this context, there is a need to restructure the United Nations as the world has changed.

The world of the post Cold War period is not a thoroughly bad place. But, as Dr Mahathir said in his address, for the developing countries, including Malaysia, there is really very little to crow about.