

28 AUG 1998

NAM (A news analysis)

NAM HOLDS THE KEY TO THE BALANCE OF POWER

By: E.Sivabalan

DURBAN, Aug 28 (Bernama) -- The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) will again be haunted by the question of its relevance and role since the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of ideological power blocs at its triennial summit in this South African city next week.

Critics of the 37-year-old movement felt that except for lip service supporting NAM, it only comes alive temporarily during its summits and ministerial meetings.

Then each member goes its own way.

The end of the superpower rivalry may have robbed the movement of its main role but with the unfolding of recent events involving the United States, the situation is about to change, analysts said.

They believe that the 113 developing nations in NAM are beginning to realise that the world has been dominated far too long by a single superpower -- the United States of America -- whose unilateral actions sometimes reflect the arrogance of the Western nation.

The recent missile attacks on alleged terrorist bases in Sudan and Afghanistan was a clear case of the high-handed action of the so-called mighty Americans.

Many developing nations, including Malaysia, also came under severe attack from currency speculators (mostly from Western countries) who have paralysed their economies to the extent that millions have lost their jobs while banks and companies have gone insolvent.

Realising the gravity of the situation, leaders of developing nations, including Malaysia, will meet here on the edge of Africa on Sept 2 for the 12th NAM Summit to chart a new destiny for the movement as it moves away from what many describe as "the orthodoxies and repetitious hortatory pronouncements."

Prevailing issues like decolonisation and anti-imperialism are expected to unite NAM members to come out with one voice.

"We hope that NAM would be further strengthened to meet the challenges of the coming millennium," Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said in an interview with Bernama recently, ahead of the Aug 29 to Sept 3 summit.

He said NAM should be "responsive to the current changes and challenges confronting the world."

"We hope that as a movement, NAM would be able to adopt coordinated and common positions in the United Nations as well as in other international fora," Abdullah said.

At the last NAM Summit in Cartagena, Colombia, in 1995, Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told his counterparts to send a clear message to their detractors that "NAM is still alive and intends to play a major role in the post-Cold War era."

"NAM, on behalf of the South, will continue to champion the just cause for a new world order based on the principles of justice, equality and democracy in international relations," Dr Mahathir had said.

Even UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan had spoken on the need for NAM to be given a bigger role in the world body which still reflected the geopolitical realities of the 1940's.

Many tend to agree with Malaysia's views about NAM, especially when the world is confronted with the question of balance of power.

"Who is to watch over 'Uncle Sam' (US) -- the United Nations?, the

Security Council?

"It appears that the world is now controlled by one particular country and even the UN has no more say (control) in some of the unilateral actions of this country because of its veto power (in the Security Council)," said a foreign diplomat attending the Durban summit.

The diplomat said the time had come for NAM to get its act together and hold the balance of power.

He said the problem among NAM members was that each member country had been focusing on fulfilling their own "agendas" rather than that of the movement itself.

While the developing nations are expected to focus once again on regional issues, Kuala Lumpur will present its views on the current economic and financial crises and attempts to recolonise the developing countries.

Malaysia's crusade against these elements will be led by Dr Mahathir who has travelled to many countries, from Hong Kong to London and Namibia, over the last one year to step up his campaign for some discipline in national and international currency trading.

After more than a month touring the nation to explain the country's economic woes, the prime minister will now turn his attention to his counterparts from other developing nations who eagerly await the message from a man whom they have described as their "spokesman".

Dr Mahathir is scheduled to arrive in Durban Tuesday, only a day after Malaysia celebrates its 41st National Day, to send a clear and strong message to his counterparts that if they fail to act fast to stop currency speculators, their country's independence would be at stake.

Realising the gravity of the problem caused by currency speculators, analysts say the summit is expected to urge the IMF to speed up its review on international currency trading.

"The issue of financial crisis will be high among the prime minister's priorities at the Durban summit," said Abdullah.

The minister said Malaysia expected the currency turmoil to be included in the Durban Declaration.

NAM, formally established at the Belgrade Summit of 1961, comprises 113 developing nations and holds its summit every three years. The last summit was held in Cartagena, Colombia, in 1995.

All member states were represented at the 11th NAM Summit in Colombia although only 36 heads of state or government, including Dr Mahathir, were present.

On the whole, the summit is expected to survey a whole range of political, economic and social issues of concern to NAM members.

Abdullah said some of the main political issues to be discussed include the role of NAM, the strengthening and restructuring of the United Nations including reform of the Security Council, the UN's financial situation, disarmament and international security, Agenda for Peace, country situations in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and West Asia.

The economic issues will include international economic cooperation, globalisation, monetary and financial issues, international trade and South-South Cooperation while the social issues include health, labour, drug control and human rights.

The nuclear testing by India and Pakistan last May would also be brought up by some countries, Abdullah said.

He said Malaysia's position on the issue was that "underground nuclear tests are a serious setback to the efforts to keep the region free from nuclear weapons."

"They also undermine the efforts towards achieving a complete ban on nuclear testing," he said.

On the proposal for a UN Conference on South-South Cooperation, Abdullah said Malaysia strongly supported the proposal at the Ministerial Meeting of the NAM Coordinating Bureau last May in Colombia.

The minister said NAM member countries had been requested to offer a venue for the conference.

On new membership to NAM, Abdullah said that should Bosnia and Herzegovina "at some point apply for admission as new members, Malaysia would certainly support the application."

Asked what was expected from the Durban summit, he said he hoped that the summit would be able to address all the critical issues confronting developing countries today, in particular the economic and financial crises.

"The final document that will be adopted at the end of the summit will cover the whole range of political, economic and social issues," he added.

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