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Unite to face new wave of colonialism, NAM urged

Syed Nadzri in Durban

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday sent a clear message to developing countries, asking them to stay together to face a new wave of colonialism.

Unlike yesteryears, this colonialism, he said, was not through military might but economic assault. This, he noted, could be done by devaluing the currency of a nation, impoverishing it and pushing it into submission.

Making specific references to the Non-Aligned Movement, which is feared to be losing its relevance, he said the grouping was worth saving and rejuvenating because it provides a chance for its 114 members to survive the onslaught - more so given the ineffectiveness of the United Nations.

Dr Mahathir said this in a speech read by Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at the working session of heads of government at the 12th NAM summit here yesterday.

The summit was opened by South African President Nelson Mandela on Wednesday.

Abdullah, who has been here since Sunday, is leading the Malaysian delegation after the Prime Minister announced that he was staying back in Malaysia to handle pressing domestic matters.

Dr Mahathir, in the speech, said it was becoming pointless to see democratic reforms in the UN.

"If there is to be any reform, it is only going to strengthen the hands of those who are already strong and who want more power for themselves."

And since the Cold War ended, the big powers of the world were looking at other means to subjugate the weak, he added.

He said there had been ample demonstrations of the kind of things that could happen to those who refused to submit.

"An eye for an eye is said to be the basis of Muslim justice, but for the vengeful powers, one eye is not sufficient. Two or more eyes can be exacted for the loss of one. It does not matter if the eyes belong to the innocent. The important thing is to teach the world a lesson. Submit or be damned."

And it was clear, he said, that colonialism was making a comeback after the conflicts of the Cold War were over.

"Of course, it is not going to take the same form, but it is colonialism just the same. The strong and the mighty will quite literally rule us, determine our fate and our roles in the international scheme of things. Poor as we are, we will be exploited even as in the past they exploited us," he noted.

The Prime Minister said NAM members could look at their system of South-South co-operation which had been devised and tried out quite successfully.

"It is perhaps time for truly interested members of NAM to be brought into the scheme so that apart from our tri-yearly meet, we can have mutually beneficial interactions," he said, citing the co-operation between the Group of 15 countries as an example which could be followed.

G15, an offshoot of NAM, is made up of 16 countries in a network of economic, cultural and social co-operation.

"Clearly NAM is still a useful forum and organisation for the countries unwilling to be mere clients of the first world. It was founded in a bipolar world but it is clearly still needed in a unipolar world.

"The need to defend our rights is greater than ever. None of us can do

it alone but together we stand a better chance," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the day might come when the present form of subjugation was seen as ugly even from within the ranks of the powerful nations.

It may take a long time as indeed colonialism took a long time to be condemned. But God willing, the day will come when justice will triumph.

"Until then, let us keep NAM alive and let us do what we can for ourselves," he added.

The Prime Minister said the choice of Durban as a venue for the summit was of special significance to NAM which had put the elimination of apartheid as one of its agendas.

"It is therefore most fitting that President Mandela, the living symbol of the epic struggle to end apartheid, has now taken over the mantle of leadership of NAM," he noted.

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