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Malaysia to continue to be vocal

Mustapha Kamil in New York

WITH 185 items on the agenda, focus would be the theme when Malaysia takes its place at the 56th Session of the United Nations General Assembly beginning next Tuesday.

While not holding significant positions in any UN platforms this year, with the exception of perhaps in the Asean group, Malaysia will all the same play an active role at the General Assembly as it has done for many years.

"We cannot be lulled into complacency," Permanent Representative to the UN, Datuk Hasmy Agam said.

Met at his office recently, Hasmy was reviewing the 185 items on the agenda.

"There is an ongoing exercise to shorten the agenda over the years. But 185 items is still a bit long," he lamented.

Fresh from a second stint as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Hasmy said the coming Assembly would relatively be low key for Malaysia. But still, many issues directly or indirectly affecting Malaysia's policies require monitoring.

Among them would be international development and financial issues where Hasmy said the concept of globalisation and the division of wealth and opportunities remained unsettled.

"I must reiterate that we are not against globalisation. But everyone must be vigilant about what it really brings," he said.

So too would be the long overdue revamp of the international financial architecture, which at present clearly favours large money movers at the peril of poorer nations.

Almost five years after UN agencies the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank spoke of the need to review the international financial architecture after the Asian financial crisis, little in reality has been accomplished.

Another subject expected to be in the limelight at the Assembly would be financing-for-development.

A major UN conference on the issue is scheduled in Monterrey, Mexico early next year and the forthcoming Assembly was expected to prepare for the meet.

Malaysia's Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is likely to attend the Mexico conference.

There will also be issues that does not directly affect the country, such as debt relief for the heavily indebted and poor countries.

While such issues did not affect Malaysia, our friends at the UN needed our continued participation in highlighting them at the Assembly, Hasmy said.

On global security aspects meanwhile, Malaysia has marked the nuclear disarmament issue as one which it will have plenty of interest in.

In recent months, the nuclear arms landscape has changed considerably.

The active push by the US for an anti-ballistic missile defense system since last year has threatened the years of negotiations and existing treaties among major nuclear powers that have kept the world safe from the weapons of mass destruction.

"From our perspective, any attempt to erode the Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty and other past agreements would undermine the present stability.

"We would be critical on this as it will negate achievements of decades

of negotiations on nuclear disarmament," Hasmy said.

Hasmy stressed that Malaysia will continue to push for observation of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

The CTBT has not come into effect yet as it has not been able to get all the 44 core countries, including the US, to ratify the treaty.

Technically therefore, nuclear weapons test can still occur.

The only thing preventing that now is a loose unilateral moratorium against testing among the nuclear powers. On more specific security issues, expect Malaysia to be vocal on the West-Asia conflict between Israel and Palestine.

The focus would be pushing for nothing less than a comprehensive resolution to the conflict that has killed hundreds, mostly Palestinians.

Many diplomats here expect heated discussions on the conflict. As for what to expect from such discussions, they said the walkout by the US and Israel from the UN Conference on Racism, Xenophobia and Intolerance in South Africa recently was a good indicator.

The West-Asian conflict has surpassed being a security issue alone, he said. Having returned from the troubled spot as member of a UN fact-finding mission recently, Hasmy said the situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip also involve good governance and human rights abuse issues.

He related how an official from South Africa said that what was happening in the West Bank and Gaza Strip was even worse than Apartheid itself.

Unfortunately, critics of Malaysia's human rights record in America and Europe have been silent on the abuses going on in the Palestinian townships by Israeli security forces.

Meanwhile as in previous years, Malaysia will also rally around the sub-groupings it has traditionally be active in.

Generally, it usually links its positions around those of Non-aligned Movement countries while for development and economic issues, around those of the Group of 77, which is the negotiating arm for developing nations.

Asean, meanwhile, is a more cross-cutting grouping as at the UN, it usually has positions in the security, economic and development issues.

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