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PM will be speaking from a position of strength

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AWAY from Thomas Mann's snow-capped "Magic Mountain", this year's World Economic Forum (WEF) in New York has already come under the spotlight of anti-globalisation protesters. They have organised themselves to voice their concern during the annual meeting from today.

While the 2,700 participants from around the world gather to discuss "Leadership in Fragile Times: A Vision for a Shared Future" at the prestigious Waldorf Astoria, the protesters will be back at work on the streets - the first time since the Sept 11 attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

Government leaders, Nobel Prize winners, corporate executives, Ministers, youth leaders and leaders of tomorrow gather to address the key economic, political and social issues at a gathering which has become the "world's global business summit".

The annual meeting, better known as the Davos Forum, has played a key role in identifying new trends in the economic, political, social and cultural domains, and in shaping strategies and actions for corporations and countries.

The six core themes of this year's forum are: Advancing Security and Addressing Vulnerability; Redefining Business Challenges; Reducing Poverty and Improving Equity; Re-evaluating Leadership and Governance; Restoring Sustained Growth, and Sharing Values and Respecting Differences.

These themes will be covered during the five days in numerous workshops, panel discussions, breakfast, luncheon and dinner sessions.

Among the subjects to be dealt with in detail include, The Global Economic Outlook; The Root Cause of Conflict; A safer World: How do we get there? Building a Coalition for a Stable World: Who will share in the burden? New Priorities in US Foreign Policy; Middle East Outlook: New Directions? Women in the Muslim World; Global Governance: What needs to change? Global Action to Bridge Cultural and Social Divides; Business Strategy in a Fragile Global Economy; Bridging Divides: Necessary Next Steps; From Gloom to Boom in the IT industry, and Responding to Anti-Globalisation: The New Role of Business.

What is it that prompts thousands of business leaders, entrepreneurs and decision makers, who collectively account for some 80 per cent of global industrial output, to set aside five days to rub shoulders with others much less powerful than themselves and set aside their luxurious limousines to walk or take the public transport to move from venue to venue to participate in the debates and discussions?

The world's movers and shakers will cramp in meetings which otherwise will take them months, if not years, to set up and they would have to travel round the world to achieve what they can in one place in five days.

Networking and informal sessions in the corridors and other venues on the sidelines of the annual meeting offer participants an opportunity not available elsewhere.

Others are just happy to be seen among the "rich and famous" and the "movers and shakers".

The annual meeting in New York will offer an opportunity for a "comprehensive assessment of how the global economic, business and political scene is being shaped by new factors and forces" in the post-Sept 11 period.

In addition they will seek to "identify and discuss the most appropriate

strategies for confronting the challenges in this new global environment as well as to capitalise on opportunities to strengthen global economic progress and secure a safer, fairer, and a more stable world".

In this context, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's views will be instructive. His participation in the Forum will offer participants an opportunity to listen to him first-hand as he is expected to explain the "unorthodox policies" Malaysia has pursued and implemented resulting in a stable and sustainable development.

These policies are now being accepted as alternatives to the "one size fits all" remedies proposed by the multinational institutions which have resulted in total chaos and destruction of economies, the latest being Argentina.

Dr Mahathir is scheduled to participate as a special guest in the workshop on "Ensuring Capital Flows in a Risk Averse Environment" and deliver a special message on "The Role of Islam in the Modern State" in another session.

The Prime Minister will be speaking from a position of strength on these issues. Malaysia as a moderate Islamic state is the only one that has achieved a level that can be considered as "developed". Malaysia is also a model for its multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, living in peace and harmony and has an enviable standard of living.

Many countries and businesses can learn from Malaysia's experience and pay close attention to cultural, social, religious and political sensitivities and other factors that have the capacity to alter overnight the basis for strategic decisions.

In an increasingly interdependent world, developing countries must co-operate to deal with the challenges. Malaysia has been in the forefront with its proposal for regional co-operation with its proposal for an East Asia Economic Co-operation (EAEC) in 1991.

The recent financial crisis has only strengthened the argument and need for regional co-operation. Dr Mahathir is expected to elaborate his views on this in his address on "Globalisation: Challenges and Impact on Asia". He will also elaborate on the damage and destruction caused to small developing economies by the too rapid opening up of markets and liberalisation.

With the annual meeting being held in the Big Apple and the site of the destroyed twin towers of the World Trade Center, discussions on terrorism and bio-terrorism will be high on the agenda.

Malaysia has lessons to offer in this area having successfully defeated the Communists. And Dr Mahathir will speak of Malaysia's experience in fighting terrorism and the global lessons in his address to the Asia Society.

At the end of the five days, corporate movers and shakers, political leaders and social workers hope to go home better prepared to deal with the uncertainties of the changed world and perhaps with a road map and clear vision of their own businesses.

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