

'Heed majority'

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NEW YORK: The United Nations is helpless to protect the weak and the poor and should be restructured to reflect the voice of the majority, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He called for the abolition of the "undemocratic single country veto" that has made the UN and its agencies "impotent" and used as national organs of the powerful.

Mahathir, making his final speech as head of government at the 58th session of the General Assembly yesterday, proposed that the single veto be replaced with a modified veto where two veto powers backed by three other members of the Security Council would be needed to block any resolution.

"But slowly even this should be dismantled in favour of majority decisions in the Security Council," he said.

He pointed out that the General Assembly, conceived as a forum for the nations of the world, has unfortunately become subservient to the Security Council, which in turn is subservient to any single one of the five victors of a war fought more than half a century ago. "It is hardly a democratic forum."

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This is Mahathir's last speech at the UN in his 21 years as premier. Known for his cutting remarks against injustice, the chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, expressed frustration that the UN could be ignored and pushed aside as it struggles to be relevant.

"Its organs have been cut out, dissected and reshaped so they may perform the way the puppet masters want," he said, also referring to bodies such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organisation.

These financial world bodies have now been turned into instruments of hegemony, to impoverish the poor, and to enrich the rich. "It is not surprising that the disparities between the rich and poor are far greater."

The prime minister called on members of the world body to pause and take stock of things and quoted a Malay saying that when one loses his way he should go back to the beginning.

Earlier, he called on the president of the 58th session of the UNGA Julian Hunte and met UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan (*picture Page 2*).