

25 FEB 2003

NAM-Closing

DR MAHATHIR: NAM REMAINS RELEVANT AS EVER

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 25 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has declared that the 47-year-old Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) remains as relevant as ever today in protecting and promoting the interests of the South countries in a world clearly dominated by big powers which care little for developing nations.

The Malaysian prime minister, who took over the chair of the 13th summit, said that NAM's relevance should no longer be questioned.

It had now been revitalised, embodying "our hopes and aspirations for economic prosperity in a world that is peaceful, secure and just" and should endeavour to be on par with the developed North, he said.

However, he said, the NAM members had a crucial role to play in closing ranks and strengthening their unity so as to be able to speak with one voice on issues of vital importance to the movement.

Otherwise, they faced the prospects of continuing to be dominated by the west, he said in his closing remarks late tonight after two days of intense discussions and presentations by well over 50 leaders.

"While we do not need to be confrontational in our approach, there is also no need to be subservient or defensive in our relations with the developed countries," he said.

For Malaysia, as the new chairman of NAM which was a heavy responsibility, it looked forward to working very closely with the other members to further enhance the movement's international profile and increasing its political clout and economic "clout" in global affairs.

Dr Mahathir said the leaders, after a hard-headed analysis of the world and the movement, agreed that the well-being of the world would be better served by a strong multilateral system, revolving around a United Nations that is more representative and democratic, than a unilateral system based on the dominance of one power, however benign that power may be.

"We are resolved to give strong and sustained support to the UN, for its future is linked with that of NAM and multilateralism," he said.

He reminded the NAM members to play their part in the international effort to combat terrorism, which was among the new challenges confronting the movement.

The other was globalisation and the "efforts towards integration of the developing countries into a new political, economic and human global order that is equitable, just and democratic".

Equally important was the revolution in the information and communications technology that was rapidly changing the world and widening the digital divide between the developed and developing world, he said.

But time was running which was why "all of these and other challenges require appropriate and urgent responses, clear and pragmatic strategies and well-coordinated actions," said Dr Mahathir.

He said: "Our overall approach is a sound one and is consistent with the principles of justice and democracy. We must strengthen our unity and solidarity and expand our cooperation in the political, economic, social, cultural, scientific and technical fields."

The prime minister said it was gratifying to note that the NAM leaders had adopted the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Revitalisation of the Non-Aligned Movement, "which constitutes an important blue-print for our collective action."

"It provides clear guiding principles and practical action plans, which

would assist us in charting our course in the coming years and we hope that with its revitalisation, our movement would be more pro-active and responsive to the concerns and needs of member states.

"Each and every NAM member has an important responsibility and role to play in the revitalisation of the movement," Dr Mahathir said.

As for the First Ladies' meeting which though was not part of the NAM process, Dr Mahathir said the spouses expressed their opposition to war as an instrument for achieving political objectives.

The prime minister expressed the hope that with a new sense of awareness of the continued relevance of NAM and the challenges confronting it, "we will rise to the occasion."

-- BERNAMA

MR MR JK