

23 FEB 2003

NAM-WrapUp

DR M'S CALL FOR NAM BUSINESS COUNCIL HAILED

By: Neville D'Cruz

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 23 (Bernama) -- Despite deep international concerns about the threat of war in Iraq, the nuclear standoff in North Korea and the escalating Israel-Palestine conflict, the economic aspirations of developing countries, took centre stage at the 13th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) conference today.

Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad read the thoughts of NAM leaders to propose that a business council be incorporated into the NAM agenda.

The council, he said, would harness economic resources and enhance trade and investment linkages within NAM's 114 members which will increase to 116 in this summit.

In other summit developments today, it was announced that the Kuala Lumpur Declaration was ready and will be tabled at the NAM leaders' summit tomorrow.

With regard to the Palestine issue, the leaders are certain to recommend that action be taken against Israeli atrocities in Palestine and that Israel be hauled up to the International Criminal Court to face war crime charges.

Addressing about 1,000 delegates at NAM's Business Forum, a Malaysian initiative, Dr Mahathir felt that South-South cooperation was particularly crucial against the backdrop of a difficult global economic scenario fraught with fear of terrorism which was bad for business and only served to raise the cost of doing business.

A business council would step up the momentum for South-South economic cooperation aimed at enriching struggling Third World countries. It would also open opportunities for the private sector companies to contribute to the economic growth of South nations.

Many countries had much sought-after resources which can be turned into wealth for the good of humanity.

Dr Mahathir, the incoming NAM chairman, told the forum at the Sunway Lagoon Resort Hotel in Petaling Jaya that NAM must close ranks to shield against the domination of a world controlled by a select few.

He said it was fundamental to address this issue in a unipolar world where the cultures and traditions of developing nations are ignored.

The two-day Business Forum will also discuss ways to form joint ventures among South-South countries.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee backed Mr Mahathir's call for economic cooperation when he said reform of the international financial sector was paramount for growth.

He said it was well known that unstable capital flows severely disrupted developing economies.

President Megawati Sukarnoputri called on developing countries to collectively transform their enormous natural resources into concrete economic activities for a fair world.

She urged the NAM business community to work together to manage, manufacture and market the enormous natural resources some countries had.

Describing the Business Forum as an excellent meeting of ideas, Thailand's Prime Minister Dr Thaksin Shinawatra said NAM should tap into the Asia Cooperation Dialogue and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum to enhance business.

"If we can do it in Asia, let us foster similar cooperation within

NAM," he said.

With regard to the Kuala Lumpur Declaration, Syed Hamid told the media that consensus on the final draft was reached today. "The declaration will be tabled in toto tomorrow and we hope there will be no debate or controversy, for instance, on the permanent secretariat," he said.

However, it is understood several countries are not keen on the secretariat proposal.

NAM wants the UN to be directly involved in resolving the Palestine issue. It also wants UN to establish a peacekeeping force to help end the protracted conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Syed Hamid said both parties should come to the negotiating table to find peace in the region.

Malaysia's stunning political and economic achievements have impressed many that several NAM member states were keen to emulate the country.

Eritrean Foreign Minister Ali Said Abdella had asked Syed Hamid for the use of Malaysia's expertise to help develop Eritrea's agriculture, fisheries, tourism and oil exploration sectors.

Uganda is amazed with Malaysia's economic success and wants to know how to achieve growth in a variety of fields. "We would like to emulate mainly the advanced planning and implementation of policies," said James Wapakabulo, Uganda's Third Deputy Prime Minister.

Nepalese Foreign Minister Narendra Bikram Shah thanked Malaysia for employing 100,000 Nepalese. The Himalayan kingdom will upgrade its consulate in Kuala Lumpur to charge d'affaires level.

Several leaders called on Dr Mahathir today for bilateral discussions. Among them were Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, the Nepalese Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand, the Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, South African President Thabo Mbeki, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri.

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