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NAM-Wrapup

MALAYSIA SET TO PLAY DYNAMIC ROLE TO REVITALISE NAM

By: Neville D'Cruz

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 20 (Bernama) -- Day one of the 13th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit here saw Malaysia, as the incoming chairman, pronouncing its determination to raise the bar in the revitalisation of the 47-year-old movement and meeting challenges from the rich and powerful head-on.

Speaking at the start of the NAM Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) today, Malaysia's Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar set the tone when he appealed to member nations to "put our house in order" so that NAM could continue to champion the cause of "the weak, the powerless and the disenfranchised".

He reminded the delegates that the ball was in their court and they should grab every opportunity available to advance their economic and social wellbeing and not be intimidated by the developed nations.

Syed Hamid asked the NAM countries to be alert to the negative effects of globalisation, double standards, hypocrisy, intolerance, racism and threats to their way of life.

"The world is now unipolar in character in which the dominant, even hegemonic, superpower veers between isolationism and unilateralism, thus creating a lot of uncertainty and disequilibrium in the international system," he said.

The minister pointed out that the fight against terrorism had brought out "the worst racist impulses" in several developed countries.

Syed Hamid's strong speech was well-received by the delegates who were profuse in their praise of Malaysia's leadership and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's role in championing the cause of the developing countries and the poor.

Egypt's Deputy Foreign Minister Mohamed Ezzeldine said Malaysia was well respected in the international arena and it was "very significant" that NAM had chosen Malaysia to lead the movement over the next three years.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Khoshroo Gholamali expressed optimism that Malaysia would have a big impact on the advancement of the movement because Malaysia was highly respected in the United Nations and influential among Muslim countries.

Contrary to speculation in the Western media on NAM's popularity and strength, the movement is marching on and expanding with Timor Leste and St Vincent and the Grenadines getting the nod today from NAM senior officials to join the diverse group of nations, thus boosting its membership to 116.

SOM also established the Political Committee and the Economic and Social Committee, headed by Ecuador and the Philippines respectively.

In a significant move, SOM agreed to a Malaysian initiative that a separate statement be prepared on the situation in Iraq. Malaysia will take the lead in coordinating a discussion on the pressing issue.

Syed Hamid told reporters at a media briefing later that NAM could not remain silent on Iraq although its members had a duty to back any decision by the United Nations.

NAM should be committed to peace, he said, adding that peace had been the cornerstone of NAM.

There was disappointment among the delegates today when it was announced that King Abdullah II of Jordan, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi will not be attending the summit.

Delegates were looking forward to their attendance to gain first-hand knowledge of the Iraqi crisis.

Those taking part in the Summit will include Morocco's King Mohammed VI, Cuban President Fidel Castro, Afghan President Hamid Karzai, President Sayyed Mohammad Khatami of Iran, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

All the Asean leaders are expected to attend, bringing the number of leaders due here to 56 as of today.

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