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NAM-Mahathir (Magazine)

NAM HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO HELP RESOLVE WAR PROBLEM, SAYS DR M

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 19 (Bernama) -- The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has no choice but to help resolve problems of war and terrorism before attention can be focused on helping its members, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said after resolving the present crisis, NAM must come up with a reasonable strategy and plan for helping the poorer members of the group with international cooperation.

"Only then will the world pay attention to the economic and political problems faced by the members of NAM," he said in his written reply to questions from the New Voice of Asia magazine focusing on NAM, the 114-member movement which convenes its 13th leaders' summit here tomorrow.

With much of the world preoccupied with the twin issues of global terrorism and war, Dr Mahathir was asked what NAM could do to refocus attention on major international problems such as the marginalisation of developing countries resulting from the advancement of technology and inequities in the multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Dr Mahathir said NAM could put forward a rational view on the causes of terrorism and the need to remove them apart from merely upgrading security and the use of arms.

Admitting that NAM was still facing many problems in the political, economic and social fields, Dr Mahathir said the movement had to address them as a single body in order to achieve clout.

He was also queried on suggestions that NAM be transformed into a formal organisation with a permanent secretariat and other administrative infrastructures.

To this, Dr Mahathir said NAM members were not well off and had too many different and conflicting interests for them to support a single secretariat which must reflect the views of all the different members.

NAM, he said, could only give general support for a very few specific issues.

NAM is not an organisation and therefore it does not have such formal structures as a constitution, secretariat or executive body. The movement has a coordinating bureau at the United Nations in New York to coordinate its activities.

On whether the size of the movement had helped or hindered the achievement of its objectives, Dr Mahathir said the more members it had, the more influential NAM would be in drawing attention to the problems faced by its members.

Touching on the relevance of NAM following the end of the Cold War and the rise of a unipolar world centred on the United States, he said if people thought of NAM as a counterpoise to correct the imbalance in the East-West confrontation, then NAM was no longer relevant.

But, citing the example of the North, which was somewhat divided on whether or not to strike Iraq, Dr Mahathir said NAM could throw its weight according to the wishes of its members.

In this particular case, he said it would be for or against war.

In this connection, Dr Mahathir said the priority areas in the agenda of the NAM summit were current issues, particularly the impending war on Iraq and the use of war in the resolution of international conflicts.

The spectre of United States-led war is hanging over the heads of Iraqis over accusations that the oil-rich country of 24 million possesses

weapons of mass destruction.

Queried on whether the consensus approach in making NAM decisions had made the movement more or less effective, Dr Mahathir said decision by consensus was always problematic.

"But provided the words used are not too strong, consensus can be achieved," he said.

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether he was optimistic about the future of NAM countries in terms of progress made in socio-political areas such as having a democratic government, people-centred development and protection of human rights.

Replying that it would be a slow and frustrating process, Dr Mahathir, nevertheless, said NAM would always be a useful vehicle for the countries of the South.

The New Voice of Asia is a quarterly magazine started in 1998 to counter negative reports on the then financial crisis. However, it ceased to operate after one-and-a-half years.

It has been relaunched for NAM and will continue to be published quarterly. Chairman of the Malaysian Institute of Directors, Tan Sri Lim Kok Wing, is the man behind the magazine.

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