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NAM-COUNCIL
NEED FOR BUSINESS COUNCIL IN NAM

By Mohd Arshi Daud

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 25 (Bernama) -- The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which currently focuses on political and security issues, ought to have have a parallel economic forum in the form of a business council to invigorate business linkages and boost private sector co-operation among its 114 members.

More importantly, NAM countries could come together and present an united front on global economic matters.

This is especially so, given the raw deal given to them by developed nations in global trade and investment negotiations.

Despite the abundant potential to take commercial ties to a significantly higher plane since the NAM membership constitutes two-thirds of the membership in the United Nations, it is unfortunate that such co-operation is very minimal. This means that the business communities within NAM are not very conscious of the opportunities available to them.

Recently international trade and industry minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz spoke of the need for such a business council within NAM.

Sunway Group corporate advisor Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam, in supporting the proposal, said such a business council could foster more meaningful South-South co-operation.

All this while NAM has been regarded as more of a political movement and some even say that it lacks the credentials to push economic goals among members or be socio-politically motivated.

Although the loosely-constituted NAM was set up as a counterpoint to the Cold War between the United States and the former Soviet Union, he asserted that the movement has what it takes to push an economic agenda.

This could gather greater currency with Malaysia set to assume the NAM chairmanship for the next three years with the commencement of the movement's 13th summit in Kuala Lumpur from Feb 20 to Feb 26, 2003, he opined,

Besides the business council, Navaratnam also proposed the setting up of a website to display the business collaboration that could be potentially explored by the private sectors in NAM economies.

The website, he said, should be managed by a NAM secretariat that not only organises the grouping's activities, but also conducts research, promotion and co-ordination of NAM policies.

NAM at present operates without a permanent secretariat but its activities are co-ordinated from New York by NAM member countries' ambassadors or permanent representatives to the UN.

Navaratnam told Bernama that the proposed secretariat, which should be benchmarked against the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), must hire "the best possible brains" from the South and friendly experts of the North so that it could have the best research capabilities.

NAM, which is basically a grouping of the developing countries of the South, requires a strong research team to argue against the unfair treatment meted out to NAM countries by the West in their trade and investment dealings.

For instance, Navaratnam said in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations, developing countries often got a raw deal, and alleged that the world trade body was "framed by the West for the West."

"NAM countries should make a strong case that if the West doesn't ensure a fair trade and investment regime, then the continued economic

exploitation (of the South) could eventually lead to increased terrorist acts by those economically impoverished.

"This is because poverty (caused by the economic gap) will provide the most favourable environment for growing resentment, frustration and ultimately terrorism," he said.

But to be able to have such a concerted act to protect its interests, the first step that NAM should take is to foster a strong sense of unity among its members, said Navaratnam.

This, combined with a commitment to step up intra-NAM trade and a zest to reduce their dependency on trade with Western countries, would help make the movement an engine of economic growth for its members.

He also said the international smart partnership dialogue concept initiated by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, which encourages a win-win situation among players, economies should be adopted by NAM.

Kuala Lumpur could take this a step further by encouraging the less developed NAM members to come here and learn the role of the private sector in economic development, particularly in the context of Malaysia Incorporated and privatisation. -- BERNAMA

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