

25 SEP 2003

Mahathir-UN

UN COLLAPSING ON ITS CLAY FEET, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: Salmy Hashim

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 25 (Bernama) -- The United Nations, "collapsing on its clay feet" and helpless to protect the weak and the poor, should be restructured and democratised to reflect the voice of the majority, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said in his final speech as head of government at the 58th United Nations General Assembly here Thursday.

He called for the abolition of the "undemocratic single country veto" that has made the UN and its agencies "impotent" and used as national organs of the powerful.

Dr Mahathir proposed that the single veto be replaced with a modified veto where two veto powers backed by three other members of the Security Council would be needed to block any UN resolution.

"But slowly even this should be dismantled in favour of majority decisions in the Security Council," he said.

He pointed out, the General Assembly, conceived as a forum for the nations of the world has unfortunately become subservient to the Security Council, which in turn is subservient to any single one of the five victors of a war fought more than half a century ago. "It is hardly a democratic forum."

This is Dr Mahathir's last speech in his 21 years as prime minister.

Known for his cutting remarks against injustice, the current chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, expressed frustration that the United Nations could be ignored and pushed aside as it struggles to be relevant.

"Its organs have been cut out, dissected and reshaped so they may perform the way the puppet masters want," he said, also referring to other world bodies such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation.

These financial world bodies have now been turned into instruments of hegemony, to impoverish the poor, and to enrich the rich. "It is not surprising that today the disparities between the rich and poor are far greater."

The free market "is not a political force for the disciplining of governments."

For the right to exploit world trade, he suggested that a tax be levied by the UN to build needed infrastructure for the poor countries of the world.

He added, exchange rates should be fixed by an international commission based on relevant issues. Apart from a small commission, no profits may be made by speculating or manipulating exchange rates.

Meanwhile, subsidies by rich countries for the production of food and other products must be forbidden although poor countries must be allowed for a stipulated time to protect their industries and food production.

"The world has lost its way -- We need to go back to the beginning." The prime minister calls on members of the world body to pause and take stock of things and quoted a Malay saying that when one loses his way he should go back to the beginning.

"If we dare to admit it, much of the problems that we face today are due to the arbitrary expropriation of the land of the Palestinians in order to create the State of Israel to solve the European Jewish problem," said Dr Mahathir.

Earlier, the prime minister called on the president of the 58th session of the UNGA Julian Hunte and met with the secretary general of the UN, Kofi

Annan.

The prime minister presented a gift from the people of Malaysia in the form of a "tepak sireh", a symbol of diplomacy, dialogue, friendship, cooperation.

-- BERNAMA

SH MUN AO