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NAM-Secretariat

WISMA PUTRA'S NAM DIVISION EXPERIMENT FOR PERMANENT SECRETARIAT

By: Mohd Arshi Daud

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 11 (Bernama ) -- Wisma Putra's planned new division that exclusively deals with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) matters will serve as a testbed whether a permanent secretariat for the 114-member movement is feasible, said Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

Malaysia, the host of NAM summit next month, recognises the importance of a permanent secretariat for the movement because all this while NAM's activities are coordinated from New York among NAM member countries' ambassadors or permanent representatives to the United Nations (UN).

This has led to "people outside the New York circle" being not aware that the movement was "still very much alive" and had done a lot of things "in the quiet environment of diplomacy," he said.

The new division would be headed by retiring Malaysian Permanent Representative to the UN Tan Sri Hasmy Agam.

Kuala Lumpur would use the division to gauge NAM members' willingness to contribute towards forming a permanent referral place that organises and coordinates the grouping's activities, he said.

"I think you can consider it as an experiment but I don't know whether ultimately it will evolve into a permanent secretariat or not," he told BERNAMA in an interview.

Syed Hamid said in order to have a permanent secretariat, NAM members, majority of which are themselves facing economic difficulties, would have to make monetary contributions.

However, he pointed out that a meeting of the grouping's key members in Cape Town, South Africa in early December last year concluded that making payments was something that these countries cannot afford to do.

NAM was formed at the height of the Cold War by countries wishing to be free from the influence of the United States-led Western Bloc and the then Soviet Union-controlled Eastern Bloc.

The grouping held its first summit in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1961. Malaysia became a member of NAM in 1969.

Syed Hamid said Kuala Lumpur, which would hold the Chair of NAM for a three-year period, would inject life into the grouping so that the world would know the movement was still relevant in a unipolar world today.

The core objectives of NAM are still intact including ensuring economic well-being, multilateralism, security, sanctity of the UN Charter, and non-intervention, he said.

Kuala Lumpur, he said, would give NAM "a push...a jerk to say that hey, we can still be good, we can still be important."

By rights, Syed Hamid said NAM should be a force to be reckoned with as its 114 members represented two-thirds of the United Nations 191 members.

NAM needs to be revitalised to protect the interests of developing countries because it could play a very important role in the present international multilateral system, he said.

The KL Summit, themed "Continuing the Revitalisation of the NAM" would dwell on the subjects of terrorism, intervention and unilateral action, continued military occupation of Palestine and democratisation of international institutions.

The meeting is also expected to discuss on the United States' double standard in waging war against countries it accused as the axis of evil, like Iraq and North Korea.

Questioning the US' double standards, he said : "Sometimes, we see a

multilateral process is being used when in fact the desire is for a unilateral process. So, the legitimacy for a unilateral act is done under the guise of a multilateral process or a multilateral system."

He said given the more challenging scenario faced by NAM member countries at present, the organisation would continue to be relevant and had to make its voice heard by the international community.

As a South-South body, Syed Hamid said NAM must relook at itself to turn the grouping not as the subserviant of the world event but as a grouping that deserved to be in "the mainstream of the borderless world and in the context of sustainable development and the Doha round of multilateral trade negotiations."

"I think Dr Mahathir, in his speech (during the KL Summit), will make the points very clear. If we are united in our diversity and if we are cohesive in our views, then we can be counted as a body."

This demanded NAM members not to be lethargic but to dictate their own destiny, he added.

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