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NAM urged to focus on economics

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), having proved its effectiveness as a political and strategic grouping, should also attend to the economic concerns of its 120-nation membership.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today that NAM should address the effects of globalisation on developing countries, imbalances in the international economic system, and the need to reform international financial architecture.

In his speech at the launch of the NAM Business Council meeting here, delivered by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, Abdullah went on to identify international trade, external debt, upgrading technology, eradicating poverty and strengthening south-south co-operation as areas in which NAM could play a positive role.

Present were the council's president Tan Sri Azman Hashim, vice-president Jose Concepcion, the co-chairman of the council's management board, Tarun Das, and the council's secretary-general, Datuk Dr Michael Yeoh.

Abdullah, who is the current NAM chairman, noted that NAM's 120 countries comprised two-thirds of the world's population but accounted for barely 20 per cent of the global gross domestic product.

"Their economic growth was slower in the 1990s than in the 1970s," he pointed out.

"In most developing countries, per capita income has been falling, unemployment rising and income disparities widening."

Abdullah said the NAM Business Council was among the non-governmental bodies that could serve as think-tanks providing ideas and proposals to the governments of NAM countries.

"It can also monitor global business trends and alert governments on critical developments in the international arena," he added.

The NAM Business Council will monitor issues and promote economic initiatives among NAM member countries in finance, trade, investment and technology.

The council comprises the Board of Governors, the Permanent Secretariat and Management Board, and the International Advisory Panel, which Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has agreed to chair.

Abdullah also observed that NAM nations tended to ignore the potential of south-south trade and investment in their efforts to secure an economic footing in the increasingly saturated markets of advanced countries.

"Many developing countries are leaders in certain sectors. There are possibilities for linkages and synergies in such areas," he noted.

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