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NAM: Stand up and be counted

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THE Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has always stood for something. Being non-aligned has never meant being on the sidelines, not taking a position. During the Cold War when NAM was conceived and established, there was no neutralism about its position against war, conflict, the carving up of spheres of influence, subjugation and dominance.

While the Cold War may be over, these issues and threats remain. Indeed they matter even more in a unipolar world where unbridled US dominance and mercurial decision-making threaten to push the world over the precipice in the age of terror.

The movement has never taken sides, except on that of sanity and justice. By standing up and making clear, at the 13th NAM Summit now taking place in Kuala Lumpur, its opposition to war against Iraq, the need for a peaceful resolution of the Palestine-Israel conflict, the removal of abject poverty and better terms for economic development - all of which will boost the fight against terror to which the movement must indicate its full commitment - NAM will show that it is still a relevant moral force in the world.

In a way, the current tidal wave of world public opinion against war on Iraq provides NAM with a rare opportunity to once again lead the movement for peace, at a critical juncture in the history of the world.

It cannot duck, and then grouse.

Thankfully, all the indications are, in the Kuala Lumpur summit which began on Thursday and comes to a conclusion on Tuesday, that NAM will stand up and be counted, especially on the most urgent and poignant issue facing the world today - the American intention to attack Iraq.

There is some excitement over the wording of the resolution on Iraq, but whether or not it is being held up by just Chile and Singapore, this is quite normal in a conference of the size. There is no exact congruence of interest and perception; some states could be launch-pads for an attack on Iraq, others may be beholden to the US in one way or another, whether actual or prospective.

The American guests at the summit are in Kuala Lumpur not only to observe.

Even Americans are capable of quiet whispers, to promise, cajole, even threaten. This will be over and above what has been taking place in Washington, New York and between Washington and some NAM capitals.

However, a consensual resolution should not be watered down as to become trite and meaningless. Then the 13th NAM Summit would have been much-ado-about-nothing. Without necessarily calling the US and those who support the US any names, the resolution must make the stand clear that NAM wants the Iraq issue to be settled without an attack on the country.

That the disarmament of the country must take place more vigorously in greater time, with a UN armed presence in Iraq if necessary, as France has suggested. That a second UN Security Council resolution would be necessary before there can be any lawful military action against Iraq and that, however, the second resolution should not be considered and passed when the arms inspectors had not come any where close to describing Iraq as being in material breach of resolution 1441 as well as to completing their work.

It would be perfect if the NAM resolution on Iraq could also say that an attack on Iraq without UN Security Council sanction would be an illegal

act of war but, I fear, a small minority of NAM members would balk at this, although I hope and pray they would not some day face the same threat from some powerful country without any interposition of international law.

Not this year, darling

OVER the long haul, NAM cannot be effective if it only comes to life once every three years. Of course the NAM caucus is active at the UN, and just last week nearly 50 members were able to speak at the UN, all against the war on Iraq.

However there is a need for NAM to be more evident than just at the UN. This requires a certain leadership and enthusiasm on the one hand, and a certain permanence on the other.

The first it had plenty of in the early days which then dissipated with the passing of the great founders; the second had always been elusive because of size and financial cost.

Nehru, Nasser, Sukarno and Tito were towering figures who led the movement to great effect, whatever shortcomings there might have been in their own domestic politics or in their countries' bilateral relations, including with other NAM members.

Sukarno, for instance, tried to exclude Malaysia from the 1964 NAM Summit, but failed, and then failed more miserably in his management of Indonesian domestic politics in 1965.

Nasser made a fatal mistake going to war with Israel in 1967, after having survived the Suez crisis of 1956, and then perhaps misreading his country's own capabilities and the lack of reality of his much-beloved Arab nationhood.

Nehru always brooded over Kashmir (at a time Pakistan was not a member of NAM) and was really broken by the 1962 war with China which exposed India's relative weakness and his idealised sense of a peaceable relationship with Beijing (then Peking).

Tito, while having a good international reputation, had to struggle to keep Yugoslavia together against internecine inter-ethnic threats which, with his going, ultimately caused the destruction of the country, which today no longer exists as an entity.

Despite all these serious distractions, they still were able to generate an enthusiasm for the movement, because of their own commitment, but also because of the cause it represented.

From the time of the Bandung Afro-Asian Conference in 1955 to the first NAM summit in Belgrade in 1961, they were able to instil a commitment to the movement as a result of their leadership and because of three factors, namely, anti-colonialism, need for greater justice in international economic development and the threat of the Cold War, with all the machinations that accompanied it, which were encapsulated in the five principles:

- \* Respect for territorial integrity
- \* Mutual non-aggression
- \* Mutual non-interference in domestic affairs
- \* Equality and Mutual Benefit
- \* Peaceful co-existence

Although the Cold War has ended, all these principles remain valid, especially as the Cold War has been replaced by the Age of Terror, characterised by wanton terrorism and extra-territorial US military response and unilateral acts of pre-emption, even as old economic inequality persists.

And, even if some NAM countries themselves have not always adhered to all its principles, they remain relevant in the relations between states. Thus the NAM is needed and continues to be relevant and need to be

revitalised.

The old formula of towering leaders is perhaps not available or apposite, but what should be in place is a new commitment, to be driven by professional foreign ministries with full leadership support. NAM must look at giving a permanence to the principles that drive it by ensuring their ready expression.

It may be too costly to have a permanent secretariat, but there could be a kind of synod representing various regional groupings within the movement which could meet more frequently than just once every three years to take a position on major issues to be expressed by the incumbent chairman of NAM.

Malaysia should lead the way as chairman for the next three years, with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad giving the impetus until his retirement in October, after which he could still continue as wise-man and ambassador-at-large for the movement.

The movement would also carry greater weight, beyond the weight of numbers which can sometimes be a mixed blessing, if China became a member and did not remain just an observer.

There will be many benefits to the NAM and world peace if this were to happen, the sooner the better.

All efforts to revitalise the movement, therefore, should be given priority to ensure its principles are not just relevant on paper.