

22/02/2003

Diplomats see new direction under Malaysia

DIPLOMATS have expressed confidence that NAM will be revitalised into a more action-oriented entity after Malaysia assumes its chairmanship.

The general consensus is that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will see to it that NAM is steered to a new direction.

"We will see this happen when Malaysia takes over (the chairmanship)... there is no doubt about it.

"NAM is a tremendous force to be reckoned with and it will only grow from here on," Cuban Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Abelardo Moreno said yesterday.

Dismissing the notion that NAM was just another talk-shop, Moreno said NAM had tremendous potential.

Cuba, which last hosted the NAM summit in 1979, will take over the organisation's leadership when it hosts the summit at Havana in 2006.

Senior officials of 114 NAM countries attended two days of high-level meeting which started on Thursday to set an agenda which is expected to denounce any US-led war against Iraq.

Apart from that, they have also thrashed out issues on terrorism, Palestine and North Korea and also discussed matters such as global disarmament and economic turmoil.

Jesus Domingo, director of foreign affairs from the Philippines, said NAM detractors should realise it was the biggest organisation outside the United Nations.

"To say that NAM has not been effective is unfair. People should understand what NAM is all about and to do so one must first understand the UN, which can be likened to a parliament.

"If you look back at history, NAM was instrumental in helping to isolate the former South African regime which promoted apartheid and had extended its support to many countries which are now independent," he said.

Domingo added that NAM delegates were now putting their hearts and souls into tackling the current hot issues involving Iraq and North Korea.

He said this included deliberating on ways to help solve the Iraqi crisis through peaceful means and urging Pyongyang to rejoin the global arms control treaty or the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Asked how NAM could be more pro-active in making its stand, Domingo said it was an ongoing process which involved greater action from leaders.

"Of course, we have to be more active but the process is ongoing.

"However, this is not going to come about by condemning NAM. I think there should be a halt to UN- or NAM-bashing," he said, adding that the NAM Summit should not be considered as just another junket for diplomats.