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`NAM need not be confrontational' (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The 13th Non-Aligned Movement Summit ended with a late-night closing ceremony and a call by its chairman, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, that NAM must speak with one voice and need not be confrontational in its approach to issues or with others.

With so many issues and challenges facing NAM, the Prime Minister said: "In the face of all these challenges, it is clearly in our interest to strengthen our unity and cohesion and speak with one voice on issues of vital importance to us.

"While we do not need to be confrontational in our approach, there is also no need to be subservient or defensive in our relations with the developed countries."

Seeming satisfied with the proceedings he had presided over for two days, Dr Mahathir maintained that the relevance of NAM could no longer be questioned. Indeed, he said, NAM was more relevant now in protecting and promoting the interests of the countries of the South.

The summit was held with the threat of war over Iraq, the continued denial of full self-determination for Palestine, North Korea's decision to opt out of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) and a host of other pressing issues.

The closing ceremony was broadcast live over national television. Over the last two days and in sober terms, NAM heads of government and state deliberated and made their stand on these challenges, culminating in the release and adoption of four documents.

They are the Kuala Lumpur Declaration, the Statement on Iraq, the Statement on Palestine and the summit's traditional Final Document, whose 376 paragraphs outline NAM's policies and stance on many global issues.

Dr Mahathir said: "I am particularly gratified that we have adopted the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Revitalisation of the Non-Aligned Movement. The declaration constitutes an important blueprint for our collective action.

"It provides clear guiding principles and practical action plans, which will assist us in charting our course in the coming years. We hope that with revitalisation, our movement will be more pro-active and responsive to the concerns and needs of member states."

He noted that the First Ladies of NAM had held a meeting to express their opposition to war as an instrument for achieving political objectives. Each and every NAM member, he said, had an important responsibility and role to play in the revitalisation of the movement.

In conclusion, the Prime Minister said: "I am confident that with a new sense of awareness of the continued relevance of NAM and the challenges confronting it, we shall rise to the occasion. As the new chairman of NAM, Malaysia looks forward to working very closely with the other members to further enhance the movement's international profile and increase its political and economic clout in global affairs.

"In formally assuming the heavy responsibility of the chair of the movement, Malaysia trusts that it will have the full and unstinting support of each and every member of NAM."