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NAM needs to draw up new road-map for peace, growth

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THE Non-Aligned Movement has to place itself in the forefront of the movement for peace and equitable development. The world scenario has changed since its formation when the world was divided into two blocs with different ideologies. In today's unipolar world there are other issues that require its attention.

Finding solutions to the new problems and issues faced by its members means NAM must seek pragmatic and non-confrontational ways of solving them. The Indian High Commissioner to Malaysia Veena Sikri stressed that NAM should tap its strengths, seek commonalities and issues that unite the membership.

There is indeed an issue that unites all members currently. They are all against war. Thus in the unipolar world and in an era where the "instrument of war" is being used as a foreign policy tool and a mechanism to dominate the world, NAM can carve out a role and speak for millions around the world who want peace and development.

In spite of the geopolitical change and because of the present situation where there is only one superpower, there is an urgent need for alternative views and this is where NAM must claim its role.

The Movement continues to be relevant and is necessary in the pursuit of world peace and a secure world for the sharing of wealth and prosperity. It must stress and push for a more equitable world order with more equitable representation in the multilateral institutions. The lone superpower exerts its influence through international and multilateral institutions in addition to the use of soft power and force.

War and pre-emptive attacks are being pushed as a means and vehicle to implement agendas by the developed countries. The world's only superpower has equated nuclear weapons to conventional weapons, according to a participant at a seminar on NAM. Datuk Dr Ronald McCoy, President of the International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War, told the participants that Washington claims the right to use nuclear weapons in any conventional war. Incidentally, the US is the only country that has used the nuclear bomb.

The Non-Aligned Movement with a membership of 114 (set to increase to 116 by the end of the Kuala Lumpur Summit) can act as a counter force. Individually they have no voice or strength. They neither have the military power nor the economic muscle, but collectively NAM members are a powerful force as they account for two-thirds of the UN membership. But they must stand united and speak with one voice to capitalise on their potential and inherent strength and power.

NAM should stand up against the US in its push for military action on Iraq. With the majority of the world opinion against war, as evidenced from the massive rallies in more than 600 cities around the world over the weekend, NAM with its non-confrontational approach can align with millions around the world.

"No matter how benign the superpower is, no matter how well-meaning it is, there is no way that the superpower can really articulate the vision and aspirations of the developing countries," Tan Sri Hasmy Agam, Malaysia's permanent representative to the UN said.

Dr Chandra Muzaffar, President of the International Movement for a Just World, said the US is in the process of creating its power and Washington is very clear what it wants. The superpower is increasingly flexing its

political, economic and military muscle on the international scene.

Unless NAM members state their stand forcefully, that wars are not instruments for conducting foreign relations at their meeting in Kuala Lumpur, they would have missed an opportunity to have their collective voice heard. There are other ways, including negotiations, of dealing with conflicts and difficult situations.

This does not make the Movement anti-US. It is a question of opposing war and its use as an instrument of foreign policy. This, as the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad stressed, "is very dangerous to world peace".

In seeking to make the world a peaceful place, NAM's three D's - Decolonisation, Disarmament and Development - are still relevant. Colonisation continues even though there is no territorial control or subjugation of property as in the past. Colonisation is more diffused today. Economic colonisation is on the march and continues in almost all corners of the world. According to Chandra the march of Pax Americana, Washington's economic colonisation and hegemonic control continues to make NAM relevant.

NAM members must be prepared to deal with economic colonisation just as the Movement was focused and helped deal with decolonisation of many former colonies, including those in Africa.

The question of development and disarmament is equally important and relevant today. The promise of development assistance and official development assistance (ODA) continues to fall short. While the developed world is ready to spend billions of US dollars on war and destruction yet its record of ODA for the poor countries is dismal.

It is estimated that the cost of a war on Iraq would be in the region of US\$156 billion (RM592 billion) and US\$755 billion over a period of 10 years. This would include peacekeeping and reconstruction.

The UN target of 0.7 per cent of GDP for ODA from the rich to the poor has not been met. America ranks last among rich countries in foreign aid as a percentage of its GDP. According to the New York Times the new programme announced by President George Bush in his recent budget does not change US ranking.

It adds that foreign aid is less than 1 per cent of the budget, and most of it goes to military or economic support for strategically important, but not particularly needy, friends - mainly Israel, Egypt, Colombia and Jordan. "This furthers American interests but should not be confused with development aid," it adds.

"The most worrisome aspect of the plan is that after the first two years, nations with incomes of nearly US\$3,000 per capita qualify," the New York Times says, adding that its allies rather than needier countries like Bangladesh and Mali would suck up most of the money.

Developing members of NAM are still grappling with poverty eradication, development, diseases such as AIDS/HIV, debt relief and desperately need development assistance. This is not forthcoming.

The energies and funds expended on wars and conflicts can and should be channelled to economic development, eradicating poverty and offering basic human needs of food, clothing, shelter and medicine. The 13th NAM meeting in Kuala Lumpur, the first in the new millennium, can help draw a new road-map for the Movement in its efforts to bring about peace and focus on development.

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