

24/02/2003

New times, new NAM

THE fundamental challenge to NAM, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in his speech at the opening of its inaugural Business Forum on South-South Co-operation, remains that of addressing the domination of the world by a select few, now no longer divided into opposing blocs.

The reality is that whenever the logic of American primacy clashes with multilateral considerations or objectives, the former prevails. The unilateralist iron fist is firmly cast inside the multilateralist velvet glove - the Security Council, Bretton Woods institutions and World Trade Organisation have been hijacked by the United States and its allies. This is manifested in past events: America scuppered the Lisbon accords in 1992, preferring to dictate its own settlement in Bosnia rather than accept a European Union initiative; its decision at Rambouillet launched a full-scale war over Kosovo; it sent Nato to Belarus and Ukraine; and, yes, gave its blessing to the Russian reconquest of Chechnya. And this show of imperialistic power will soon be replayed in the UN when it seeks an endorsement to strike Iraq.

Going by George W. Bush's rhetoric, the world is supposed to believe that Saddam Hussein is an insatiable aggressor, his regime is stockpiling weapons of mass destruction and his dictatorship is of a malignant ferocity. Never mind that Iraq does not possess the weapons dreamt of by Dick Cheney or Donald Rumsfeld.

The truth is simple: This is a war on Islam. Sept 11 is being used to recast the terms of American hegemony without the diplomatic facade. It is somewhat like the inception of the Cold War - a political equivalent of the Creation. This is America's ideological opportunity for a new international constitution, where nations live in terror of an American imperium. This is, as pointed out by Dr Mahathir, the environment that we must do business in. And woe betide us if we, the developing nations, do not learn how to handle this debilitating business climate.

Members of NAM must learn to count on each other; the business community of the South must learn to work together and its peoples interact with each other. There is no option save that of thralldom to the US.