

28/02/2003

Strengthen NAM mechanisms so that it can deliver

Hardev Kaur

THE 13th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit in Kuala Lumpur has drawn up a blueprint for the future of the organisation. It provides clear guiding principles and practical action plans which would assist NAM's causes in the future.

The road ahead is long and the world economic and political environment uncertain. The unipolar world of today is vastly different from the Cold War period when the Movement was first established. It is important that members "rise to the occasion" and face challenges or they risk the possibility of being further marginalised.

The immediate task nevertheless is the resolution of the conflict in the Middle East and specifically the Palestinian issue and the possibility of a US-led military attack on Iraq. No one wants war and indeed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad urged that "War be made illegal".

The First Ladies of the Movement, who met on the sidelines of the 13th NAM summit, also expressed their "opposition to war as an instrument for achieving political objectives". This comes in the wake of moves by some developed countries, especially the US, to increasingly use war as an instrument of foreign policy.

The business forum and the meeting of the First Ladies bring together a larger spectrum of NAM's population into direct contact and enables the political initiatives to be cemented for the collective good at various levels.

Thus, instead of focusing only on the meeting of heads of government and state, Malaysia's proposal of a business summit, a new initiative, of NAM members has been adopted. The Movement will therefore work at different levels to achieve its goals and serve its members.

Even as developed countries are resorting to unilateralism, it is agreed that NAM members' well-being would be better served by a strong multilateral system.

In this respect the current chairman of NAM, Dr Mahathir, said: "We resolved to give strong and sustained support to the UN for its future is linked with that of NAM and multilateralism".

Greater cohesion and unity among developing countries, South-South co-operation and North-South contacts are equally important.

The new challenges facing the movement include international terrorism, globalisation and efforts towards integration of developing countries into a new political, economic and human global order that is equitable, just and democratic.

Even as the political and economic scenario has changed, the Movement remains relevant and indeed as Dr Mahathir said, "it has become even more relevant today for the protection and promotion of the interests of the South".

It embodies the hopes and aspirations of developing countries for economic prosperity in a world that is peaceful, secure and with a representative and democratic system.

The organisation of 116 developing countries accounting for four-fifths of humanity and two-thirds of UN membership has its strengths and weaknesses. Acknowledging this, Dr Mahathir said the Movement will "find ways of making use of the strengths that we have".

One of its strengths is its numbers. But it can also be a weakness if they are not united and cohesive. The Kuala Lumpur Summit recognised this

and noted that in the face of new challenges "it is clearly in our interest to strengthen our unity and cohesion and speak with one voice on issues of importance to us".

With globalisation, the interests of developing countries are increasingly being marginalised. Globalisation and liberalisation appear to widen the technological, financial and productive gaps.

The income gap between developed and developing countries and within nations is widening and they have little share of the global prosperity. And unfortunately they will also be the main victims of a slowing world economy and suffer from the fallout of the Iraqi war.

This in addition to poverty eradication and socio-economic development, social injustice, the rising debt burden, HIV/AIDS, disruptive shortterm capital flows and unfavourable terms of trade which add to the members' woes.

For this, NAM needs radical steps for it to move forward. The Movement must be "proactive, rather than reactive, to international developments, especially those that impact on the members, so as to ensure the Movement is not sidelined but remains at the forefront of the international decision-making process".

The new realities of the globalised world call for a comprehensive review of the role, structure and work methods and a strengthening of the Movement. The NAM leaders spelled out several changes to make the Movement more effective and among others the structure and methodology will be reviewed.

Co-ordination and co-operation through regular meetings of the Co-ordinating Bureau in New York, Geneva, Vienna and other centres will be enhanced. This is essential to enable the Movement to be proactive rather than being reactive.

The Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Continuing Revitalisation of the Non-Aligned Movement sets out what the members need to do to ensure that the Movement "responds on a timely basis to international developments affecting the Movement and its members".

Despite their numbers, developing countries and NAM members have neither participated in shaping the policy framework nor in the management of the global economy. They have been reacting to the initiatives of developed countries as they do not have an agenda of their own in the ongoing globalisation and liberalisation process.

The situation is even more complex as the task facing developing countries is multifaceted. This cannot continue if NAM is to determine the destiny of its members.

Concern of developing countries must be on utilising the process for the strengthening of their own indigenous capabilities at the national, regional and global levels.

Constructive engagement with developed countries of the North as well as South-South co-operation and regional initiatives are necessary to ensure that the views of the Movement are fully taken into account before important decisions are made.

The leaders agreed on the need to strengthen co-ordination and co-operation and to formulate common strategies with the Group of 77 through more contacts and discussions.

To be more effective and to fulfil the aspirations and hopes of its members, the Movement must assist the Chairman with the necessary back-up systems. The relevance of NAM is not in doubt, and should not be questioned, but its mechanisms need to be strengthened so that it can deliver.

Malaysia as the Chair of the Movement for the next three years has its work cut out for it. The members look up to Kuala Lumpur to help them and

for the Movement to be more effective and to serve members' needs and interests.

A Croatian journalist summed it up for all members when she asked Dr Mahathir whether he would "stage a miracle" for NAM as he had done for Malaysia.