

24/02/2003

Strong rhetoric and well-substantiated articulation can reverse decisions

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THE 13th Non-Aligned Movement Summit proper starts today, with the incoming chairman giving an indication of what's facing the movement when he addressed businessmen yesterday.

Without mincing his words, and speaking in the manner he knows best, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad painted a rather grim picture facing the world today.

The world is in a state of terror, he said, filled by people paranoid and afraid of everything around them. Bearded people are being feared, as are white powder, shoes and metal cutlery on aircraft.

NAM, the Prime Minister said, would have to grapple with challenges such as these and work together to build a new world order based on sustained peace and shared global prosperity.

NAM heads of government and state will sit down today and chart the new way forward, hopefully, without fear or favour.

Leaders of the 48-year-old movement know what the issues before them are. The test is for them to go back to the very basic reasons for the movement's formation - to help liberate the world from those who dominated it through colonialism and other forms of hegemony.

Against the backdrop of today's paranoid world, NAM summiteers must sieve through the pile of agendas drafted before them and then prioritise according to importance. The biggest test before NAM is whether members can look beyond national boundaries and rise to stimulate a new approach benefiting all.

NAM leaders will surely need no reminding that the task before them is crucial to the fate of their members, especially those whose sovereignty is being threatened and whose citizens are engaged in a daily battle of life and death.

Nothing short of a strong condemnation is good enough in the Iraqi situation where war is imminent; and over Palestine where the people's self-determination is being denied. NAM's declared stand for peace, justice and the promotion of democracy will be put to a test over these issues.

The incoming chairman will have opinions of his own where these issues are concerned. His views on the world's wrongdoings are many and well-documented. In his own backyard, by and large, the incoming chairman cannot be faulted for walking the talk, and his bold and innovative plans have yielded benefits to citizens.

NAM HoGs need not put up an ambitious and therefore unachievable programmes as they seek to continue the revitalisation plans. Rhetoric may not stop the pending military strike on Iraq. Rhetoric, too, may not save Palestinian lives, and the lives of Israeli soldiers and others whose guns never stop firing. But this does not mean the articulation against unilateral punitive action should cease.

NAM leaders must continue to prick the conscience of the selfish and mindless powerful.

Seen from whatever perspective, NAM's usefulness cannot be underestimated. NAM leaders need to do their own soul-searching exercise and rise to the occasion to prevent what could be a new world disorder. The world is facing a clear and present danger, and NAM is in a position to do something about it.