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Taking the Chair

FOR a country that once could not fit into a neutral bloc during the Cold War, Malaysia has come a long way since the 1960s to assume the chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement with the vociferous support of all 116 members. The role is surely a form of recognition for the country and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to pursue the revitalisation of the movement given the political, economic and social scenario of member countries at present.

In fact, although Malaysia did not campaign for the chairman's post, it was asked less than a year ago to host the Heads of State Summit and, for the next three years, to lead the organisation, the largest international grouping in terms of numbers after the United Nations.

The chairmanship of NAM and the respect accorded to Dr Mahathir as seen from the unusually high turnout of heads of state/government - at 63, among the highest in the history of NAM summits despite the forbiddong international situation - indicates an evolution in the character and policies of Malaysia's prime ministers over the years.

Tengku Abdul Rahman's pro-Western posture kept the country out of NAM but this was reoriented by Tun Abdul Razak to one based on non-alignment, neutrality and peaceful co-existence, followed by a period of consolidation under Tun Hussein Onn. Dr Mahathir has made the boldest move yet in Malaysia's policy towards the Third World.