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The varied and gargantuan challenges facing NAM today

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) today faces challenges which are inexplicably varied and remarkably gargantuan in scale and scope, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

In his message to the NAM Business Forum, released by the organiser Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (Asli), he said the challenges included abject poverty, environmental risks, threats from nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, global threats to health, natural disasters, violations of human rights, and drug trafficking.

The forum is scheduled for Feb 23 and 24.

"It is imperative for member countries to unite to promote mutual growth, development and prosperity, especially when the need for an open, rule-based, accountable, just, equitable, development-oriented and non-discriminatory global system of economic relations, is greater than ever for developing countries."

He said the world today was a significantly different place from the one when the Afro-Asian Conference was held in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955, where NAM originated.

Then, Dr Mahathir said, Third World leaders shared their similar problems of resisting the pressures of the major powers, maintaining their independence and opposing colonialism and neo-colonialism, particularly Western hegemony.

"Since then sweeping changes have reshaped the world order, created new rules of the economic game and redefined boundaries of human co-operation and interaction," he said.

Far from being obsolete in the contemporary world order, Dr Mahathir said, the NAM - the members of which form an overwhelming majority in the United Nations - had a pivotal role in promoting humanity and global order.

Dr Mahathir commended the initiative by Asli and the Foreign Ministry in organising the business forum alongside the 13th NAM summit.

Asli chief executive officer Datuk Dr Michael Yeoh said the forum, organised in association with Wisma Putra and the Malaysia South South Association, was intended to further enhance South-South co-operation.

Dr Mahathir will deliver the opening keynote address. Yeoh said this would be followed by a special NAM leaders session focusing on Remaking NAM, Enhancing Co-operation.

Yeoh said the NAM business forum would also focus on enhancing regional and national competitiveness, strategies to sustain growth performance, bridging the developmental trade and digital divide, as well as NAM's changing role.

Delegates from 50 countries are expected to attend the NAM business forum.