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Who will speak up now?

Ahirudin Attan

A fellow editor who spent many years in New York went back to the Big Apple recently to witness and report, on behalf of the New Straits Times, a historic event.

It was Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's last address to the United Nations, probably the UN's greatest loss at the start of this century.

Certainly a huge loss for the choked-up majority in the General Assembly who has been relying on a handful few to speak up for the developing world.

Dr Mahathir's voice at the UN has been uncompromisingly critical of not the rich and powerful nations but of their arrogance, excesses, and deceit.

For decades, these nations and their leaders have unabashedly abused and made use of the UN to achieve their own selfish ends instead of to champion the weaker nations.

There have been other critics of the public fondling of the UN, some louder and some harsher, but none as effective.

He did not just condemn, he offered the UN alternatives, solutions.

But because he is Dr Mahathir, and because Dr Mahathir is able to call a spade a spade, damn if they would take his advice!

Dr Mahathir's final address on September 26 again called on the UN to overhaul itself and stop allowing a minority of mighty nations to ignore and push it aside.

He warned of a resurgence of European imperialism and blasted Washington for "leading the world to economic chaos, political anarchy, uncertainty and fear".

Washington, Dr Mahathir said, was promoting and imposing reforms that most of the world was not ready or willing to accept.

In any case, this fellow editor who had packed late on the eve of his flight to New York was also critical of the US, in particular, the Immigration officials at the Newark international airport.

They had put him, just after his 20-hour flight from Kuala Lumpur, through three hours of "screening" during which he was finger-printed, photographed, eye-balled.

If those officials had apologised to him for the procedures, this fellow editor would not have been able to accept their apologies.

He lived, studied and worked in New York for six years in the 1980s and 90s, went for its plays, concerts baseball games, even waved and yelled at Bob Dylan sitting on the roadside pavement one summer.

He felt an "affinity" with the Big Apple, which was partly why he volunteered for the assignment despite Americans' blindly rigid travel procedures since 911.

Now he struggles to see New York the same way he used to see New York. He told me he'd probably still volunteer for the next assignment involving the Big Apple, but not LA, Washington, or elsewhere in the US.

The rest of us have already decided to avoid the US altogether. The crime rates in those big cities are scary, anyway.