

NAM must remain united, says Abdullah

NST-17/9/2006



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Reporting from
HAVANA, CUBA

IN his departing message as chair of the Non-Aligned Movement yesterday, the Prime Minister urged developing countries to stand together and stay true to their shared aims.

"We need to maintain our unity of common purpose and enhance our cohesion and solidarity," said Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. "We must maintain consistency of our positions in all international fora and resist efforts to split and weaken us as a movement."

The 13th summit of the 116-member organisation brushed aside the long-standing issue of its relevance in the post-Cold War era, switching its attention instead to righting the world's wrongs by force of numbers.

"Thankfully, the period of uncertainty in the 1990s, when quite a few people questioned the validity of the Non-Aligned Movement when the bipolar world order came to an end, is behind us," said Raul Castro, who deputised for his brother Fidel as Cuba's leader and incoming chairperson.

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, whose presence here underscored the importance of a united front of developing countries in pushing for UN reform, said NAM was "more relevant than ever".

The NAM has grown from 30 member countries at its formal founding in Belgrade in 1961 to a caucus that covers two-thirds of the UN General Assembly and 80 per cent of the world's population. Four countries joined during Malaysia's tenure and two more are due for admission.

Sheer size, however, can bring its own problems.

"We must also be mindful that our numbers could turn out to be a liability if it makes us unwieldy, awkward and slow-moving, unable to respond quickly to rapid changes taking place around the globe," Abdullah said.

"We cannot afford to be reactive or, worse, static. We will have to learn to move nimbly, in spite of our size, in order to be an active player on the world stage. There needs to be some serious thinking on our role, strategies and approaches for the future."

The Prime Minister provided a rundown of Malaysia's leadership over the last three and a half years, consisting of busy behind-the-scenes diplomacy to realise the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Continuing Revitalisation of the Non-Aligned Movement of

2003, which, among others, sought to beef up the organisation's internal workings.

"In a new world with new realities, a dynamic NAM must be able to adapt itself to these changes, particularly in the context of globalisation. It must modernise itself and not be stuck in a bygone era."

Speaking to some 30 heads of state and government, and delegations covering the full spectrum of political systems from democracies to dictatorships, Abdullah said that NAM could not afford to make enemies.

"In continuing our struggle, we

should not be misunderstood as being against any country or group of countries. NAM is only against injustice, inequity, oppression, selectivity or double standards and all the other negative, exploitative or coercive elements of inter-state relations that take advantage of weak and vulnerable states.

"We should continue to project to the global community that NAM is a positive force in international relations and is a reliable and constructive partner for peace and development. NAM must develop new linkages and relationships with its partners in the developed

world if it wishes to play a role that is commensurate with its size and population."

The Prime Minister said NAM members must square their domestic and foreign policies. "We need to maintain a balance, as always, between national interests and the collective interests of the movement."

Elaborating at the general debate later, he said "for the sake of NAM's credibility, standing and clout as the main forum of the South, we need to adjust or reconcile our narrow national interests with the larger collective interests of the movement".