

Champion of peace and stability

THE thrust and purpose of Malaysia's foreign policy has always been, and will continue to be, the protection and promotion of national interest. Malaysia has no ideology to export and it has no secret agenda to carry out anywhere in the world.

We will, however, work to promote the establishment of a regional and international environment that is stable and peaceful.

We must therefore purposefully work to bring about peace in the world because peace is not self-creating.

Although the Cold War ended with the collapse of the Soviet system in 1990, the nature of relations between nations remains mired by the inclination of the rich and powerful to exert control and influence in various aspects of international life.

Today, this is done in the name of Globalisation. Malaysia must strive to continue maintaining an independent and non-aligned foreign policy to be able to exercise flexibility in safeguarding the national interest.

The proponents of globalisation say that, in order to create new capacities for increasing global prosperity, it is necessary to progressively dismantle borders between countries and remove other barriers between peoples.

Regrettably, we note that there is much selectivity in practice. The driving force of the globalisation process is basically economic, but its ramifications overflow into the strategic and other spheres of international relations.

Therefore, in the face of these moves to create new regimes and new rules, Malaysia must campaign to secure sufficient policy space to cater for national as well as international interests - for itself and for other developing countries.

Malaysia must continue to advocate that the process of globalisation should include the prospering and empowerment of the developing countries, not their continued impoverishment and dependence on the wealthy and developed world.

As current Chairman of the Non Aligned Movement and Chairman of the Islamic Summit Conference, it is in fact a duty for Malaysia to take a fresh lead in this critical issue.

At the same time, we need to exercise leadership on other pressing international issues as well, particularly at the multilateral level.

One of the most critical international issues today concerns the question of safeguarding the fundamental foundation of the international system.

The international community relies upon the UN to provide protection for the sovereignty of its member states. However, the UN was effectively sidelined, in March 2003, when the United States and its coalition partners decided to unilaterally invade and occupy Iraq. This episode shattered the confidence of the world's people in



JOVIAL MOOD: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi gesturing during a group photo session with delegates after opening the Malaysian heads of mission conference in Putrajaya on Monday. — STARpic by RAJA FAISAL HISHAN

the inviolability of national sovereignty.

The full political impact of the invasion and occupation on Iraq itself, on the Middle East and on the rest of the world is still unclear.

Nevertheless, Malaysia welcomes the transfer of sovereignty that has, taken place from the Coalition Provisional Authority to the Interim Government of Iraq.

The international community expects that this important step will, lead to the smooth transition to full sovereignty in accordance with the time frame already set in UN Security Council Resolution No.1546/2004.

In this connection, Malaysia continues to hold the view that the UN has an important role to play not only in the transition process but also in the reconstruction of Iraq.

The events surrounding the case of Iraq is symptomatic of the prevailing dominance of unilateralism over multilateralism. For the survival of the international system, we need to promote a return to reason and moderation through dialogue and reconciliation.

Malaysia calls upon the international community to unite in strengthening the UN and restore to the organisation its prestige and effectiveness.

In this regard, the problem of Palestine remains an urgent and important issue requiring a comprehensive and durable solution. The plight of the people of Palestine cannot be ignored because if we do so, we would seriously put at risk the peace and security of the world.

The international community must be resolute in upholding the rights of the Palestinian people to national independence and the exercise of sov-

ereignty in their own state, Palestine. After all, the road map for peace in the Middle East speaks of 2005 as the year for granting to Palestine its status as a nation state.

The international community must also not allow the world to continue to be segregated between areas of relative stability and economic growth and regions of instability and poverty.

Malaysia should propagate the view that multilateralism through the UN, is the best option for fostering meaningful North-South partnership not only for economic and social development but also for securing international peace and security.

In the process of multilateral negotiations, Malaysia, must keep emphasising the imperative for solidarity among developing countries, which should improve their negotiating strength by pooling resources in worldwide groupings such as the Group of 77, NAM and the OIC.

There could be situations, however, which require Malaysia to work with particular caucuses of like-minded countries to advance specific issues or advocate specific positions in the context of negotiations.

Should the circumstances so dictate, Malaysia must be ready to act accordingly. It should be possible to be pragmatic yet principled in Malaysia's approaches to issues or towards other countries.

When applying the principle of "Malaysia first," we must of course do so without abandoning our international responsibilities and obligations.

It should be a continuing priority for NAM and the OIC to work closely to initiate reforms

in the workings of the UN, in particular the functioning of the UN Security Council.

NAM and the OIC must also work hand in hand with the Group of 77 to advance the economic interests, of developing countries in general and in particular to achieve a fair and equitable multilateral trading system in the ongoing WTO negotiations.

The OIC, as a group, has a special responsibility to strengthen unity and arrest the creeping disunity among the Muslim Ummah. It would indeed be productive for us to focus more on matters that unite us rather than dwell on issues that divide us. The OIC must also address, in a concerted manner, the increasing prejudice against Muslims worldwide and the growing schism between the Muslim and the Western world.

The advent of globalisation, or the significance of multilateralism, does not diminish the relevance of regionalism. In South-East Asia, Asean is the embodiment of this relevance.

In the face of globalisation, Malaysia must do everything possible to strengthen Asean and enhance its standing in world affairs. We must support steps, even incremental steps, to institute higher political and economic integration with a view to establishing the Asean Community envisaged in the Declaration of Asean Concord II of 2003. Asean must be enabled, more and more, to speak with one voice in international forums, especially on issues of regional peace and security. Malaysia should take the opportunity to advance Asean cohesion when it assumes the chairmanship of the regional organisation in 2005.

We must build upon the successes achieved in the Asean Regional Forum in response to the new regional security situation following the ending of the Cold War. Asean countries must maintain unity of purpose within the ARF process. Otherwise, Asean risks losing its influence to advance the strategic interests of Asean countries, which was the original purpose of the ARF.

The standing and influence of Asean countries in regional as well as international affairs can be further enhanced by upgrading the dialogue relationship that Asean now has with China, Japan and the Republic of Korea. Malaysia must persevere in the diplomatic efforts required to find, consensus to upgrade the Asean+3 process to become a gathering of equal partnership such as in an East Asia Summit meeting.

Malaysia is keenly aware that, in order to develop and prosper, it is quite impossible to do so alone on its own except in partnership with other countries in the region and the world. In fact, Malaysia must accelerate its economic diplomacy at regional and global levels. Malaysia wishes to have friendly relations with all countries and be enemies with none.

There could be occasions when the Government of Malaysia may have differences of views with other Governments on certain issues, but people-to-people relations should remain separate.

Malaysia has no wish to impose its ideas and values on other people. We would, however, be willing to share our experiences and knowledge, particularly with other developing countries.

The events of Sept 11 had

brought to the fore a realisation, in a manner never envisioned until then, that non-state actors, even individuals, could possess destructive capabilities which were normally, the preserve of agents of the nation states.

Terrorism is clearly a new international problem. The international community must agree to identify and define, dispassionately, the root causes of terrorism. It is definitely oversimplifying for anyone to suggest that the solution lies in bringing democracy and good governance everywhere.

The matter is not as simple as that. It would also be necessary to acknowledge that the methods we employ may need to vary from place to place or from time to time.

Now, the fight against terrorism has become entwined with the campaign against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Developing countries suffer most by the constraints imposed on access to peaceful uses of technology, equipment and material necessary for their economic development.

Malaysia is fully and firmly committed to the cause of non-proliferation. But we do not agree that the issues involved be addressed on a unilateral basis.

There must be multilateral negotiations for universal, comprehensive and non-discriminatory agreements and arrangements. Above all, nothing should be done at the expense of the priority which should be reserved for the international development agenda.

In my remarks today, I have deliberately made references to several dates. The purpose is to place a historical perspective to the issues and events that I have spoken about. I strongly believe in the power of learning from history, especially in the realm of foreign policy.

In the formulation and implementation of Malaysia's foreign policy, the leadership role of Wisma Putra in this matter will become more important and crucial in the years ahead as the issues to be faced by the country become more complex and multifaceted.

As heads of Malaysian diplomatic missions abroad, you must exercise leadership among personnel serving in your host country. You should establish ways and means to gather quality information; be competent to discuss difficult issues with your foreign interlocutors and make sound recommendations to the Government at home.

You should sharpen your negotiating skills so as to match the best of the best in the craft of diplomacy. You need to inculcate a culture of excellence and a commitment to high performance. You must have the passion and pride for the tasks you are undertaking and translate these two qualities into something useful and beneficial for Malaysia.