

'SAVING LIVES SHOULD BE PRIORITY'

NST- 27/9/2020 19.10

Manufacturing of vaccine must be an international collaboration rather than nationalistic competition, says Muhyiddin

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The manufacturing of a vaccine for Covid-19 must be done on the basis of international cooperation instead of being seen as a "nationalistic competition", says Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

Speaking at the general debate of the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly yesterday, the prime minister said the pandemic had affected the most vulnerable populations such as women and children, people with disabilities, as well as the marginalised and the displaced.

"We must remember that Covid-19 does not discriminate and because of that, our response should not too. Until or unless we obtain the anti-viral medication required to treat and a vaccine to prevent this novel coronavirus, we can never fully declare victory against it. This is why the manufacturing of a vaccine must promote international collaboration rather than nationalistic competition. Saving lives should be our priority."

He also addressed the need to reform the international financial architecture in the wake of the pandemic, whose financial and economic impact had led to the loss of numerous jobs.

He said economic devastation of such magnitude required collective action from the international community and a need to soften the impact on the livelihoods of those affected.

Malaysia, he said, had put in place economic recovery strategies, followed by an all-inclusive economic revitalisation programme, to address the socio-economic impacts of Covid-19 on the country.

He acknowledged that the balancing act that Malaysia strives to achieve — between kick-starting its economy and implementing standard operating procedures to prevent further waves of infection — had been "nothing short of challenging".

"Even though it will take some



Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin says only with an improved Security Council and United Nations can the world hope to see problems being addressed effectively. BERNAMA PIC

time before we see the results, we will continue to try our level best to return to some semblance of normalcy. And we know we can only do better with the help of the international community."

Muhyiddin, meanwhile, criticised the slow response of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to the pandemic.

The UNSC, he said, had only on July 1 adopted a resolution to demand an immediate cessation of hostilities, which would allow nations to refocus resources on combatting Covid-19.

He said differences in the UNSC had left it indecisive and ineffective and that it was time its composition reflected that of the UN membership.

"The five permanent seats in the Security Council, reserved for the veto-wielding five victors of a World War, have proven that the organisation needs to be reformed. There would not be an alliance to pursue a common goal if one party thinks it has more right to decide than the others."

Muhyiddin noted that since 1946, the veto has been wielded more than 200 times and that there is "nothing democratic" in the way the veto is used.

"The veto is open to abuse, be it sanctimoniously, hypocritically or to uphold wrongdoings. This is why we need to move the reform process forward. Only with an improved Security Council and United Nations can the world

hope to see problems being addressed effectively."

The prime minister said among the UN's most glaring failures was its inability to effectively tackle the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

He said in order to ensure lasting peace in the Middle East, Israel had to, among others, cease its illegal settlement activities, withdraw from the Occupied Palestinian Territory and surrounding Arab states, allow Palestinian refugees to return to their land and property, restore the original status of Jerusalem, as well as restore its credibility and return to the negotiating table.

He said Malaysia and the international community would continue to reaffirm its support to the realisation of the State of Palestine based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The only viable way forward, he said, was a negotiated two-state solution.

Muhyiddin also cited the ongoing Rohingya plight as another example why a stronger and better United Nations was necessary.

He said the spillover effects of the crisis in Rakhine State, including the mass migration of people from Myanmar, had significantly impacted not only Malaysia, but also neighbouring countries.

Malaysia, he said, hosted the largest number of Rohingya refugees in Southeast Asia.

"As a developing nation coping with the cost of managing and providing protection to nearly 180,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers in the country, with 86 per cent of them from Myanmar, our resources are stretched thin. Yet, Malaysia is expected to do more to accommodate these incoming refugees. Is that fair?"

He said despite not being a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, Malaysia had, nevertheless, taken up the social and financial responsibility in providing humanitarian assistance and protection to Rohingya refugees on humanitarian grounds.

He said it was time that State Parties to the Convention shouldered a proportionate burden and responsibility in addressing the problem by opening their doors for more refugees for resettlement and relocation.

Meanwhile, Muhyiddin said Malaysia had and would continue to support the accelerated ac-

tion and transformative pathways of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

He said the Covid-19 pandemic should be treated as a turning point and for the international community to respect the planet's limits and value its natural resources.

He said since the Movement Control Order, Malaysia's air quality had improved from 28 per cent to 57 per cent. However, he expressed concern that it was only a temporary reprieve and carbon emissions would rise again if everyone remained complacent.

He said the criticism of the palm oil industry as being responsible for the destruction of the world's rainforests and the extinction of wildlife was unwarranted.

"Malaysia has more than 60 national laws and regulations covering the protection of wildlife and the environment, health, the safety and welfare of workers, and control of pollutants. We are pleased and honoured to inform that we have managed to retain 55 per cent of our rainforests, exceeding five per cent of our earlier commitment."

On the UN's 75th anniversary, Muhyiddin said the UN should be a capable institution that could hear and collectively address the concerns of its members and the problems that beset the world.

"As such, let us not see the 75th anniversary of the UN go by without a resolve to fulfil our collective responsibilities. We need to build back better for our peoples not just for now but also for generations to come. Rest assured that the UN has Malaysia's fullest commitment to multilateralism, based on the purposes and principles as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations."

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The general debate of the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on Friday. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the meetings are held mostly via videoconference. EPA PIC