

NAM states eye deep

Nam *Jan 24*
By Kalinga S

KUALA LUMPUR: While officials of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) member countries here debate a statement on Iraq, many governments are forging ahead to pursue closer South-South cooperation, which they say is key to strengthening the voice of the 40-year-old movement in world affairs.

Many NAM member countries see cooperation in the fields of finance and technology as essential to help developing countries have an independent foreign policy, especially when they are dealing with issues like stopping the threatened US-led war against Iraq.

NAM is the biggest organization after the United Nations and it is very important for us to revive it," said Mohamad Osman Omar, Somali's ambassador to India, as a series of ministerial meetings began ahead of the Feb 25-26 NAM leaders' summit here.

He said that if NAM countries can develop their own banking systems and a common currency or currency

exchanges, member nations could get financial aid from each other — and this would go a long way in making NAM members less dependent on rich countries.

Omar argued that if NAM countries support each other, they would not have to seek the help of the developed and powerful nations that say "we give you grains, you give us your vote".

Addressing the NAM senior officials' meeting this week, Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar said that the challenge facing NAM is to put its house in order to avoid interference from the rich and the powerful countries who do so in pursuit of their own agendas.

NAM's core principles include opposition to "all forms of foreign aggression, occupation, domination, interference or hegemony as well as against great power and bloc politics".

Syed Hamid Albar added that globalization is threatening the very notion of sovereignty of states, at times

threatening our very viability and existence as nation states. He pointed out that indebtedness to rich countries and powerful financial institutions as a major problem.

"Globalization is something people need to understand," said Nigeria's permanent representative to the United Nations, Chief Arthur Mbanefo.

He argued that though globalization has been beneficial in terms of the Internet and other forms of modern communications, most people in the world are not able to enjoy these benefits.

People in Africa are more interested in being fed and the impact of HIV/AIDS on the workforce and their family life, pointed out Mbanefo, arguing that cooperation among NAM countries to tackle these problems is important.

NAM has to take up issues important to poorer countries and have common ground on these, so that they can

per South-South links

83
Seneviratne

defend their interests, said Addis Alem Balema, a member of Ethiopia's delegation here. NAM has to create more links, otherwise we will be forced into the dictates of developed countries.

He argued that even if NAM comes up with a good statement against war in Iraq, the United States and its allies would ignore it because NAM countries are financially too dependent on them.

Still, the head of Jordan's delegation to the NAM senior officials' meeting, Dr Musa Braizet, believes that the movement is developing a strong sense of solidarity and consensus among its members on these issues of debt, impact of globalization and financial flows.

Globalization provides opportunities for NAM (countries), but the challenge is to develop a strategy so that (member countries) will benefit from it and will be able to deal with negative consequences (on its own), he added.

This is exactly what the Jakarta-based Centre for South-South Technical Cooperation (CSSTC) is doing, according to its director of programmes, Achmad Rofii. Rather than looking at WTO (World Trade Organization) as a barrier for developing countries, we are training NAM negotiators to improve their negotiating skills, he said.

CSSTC was set up by the ministerial meeting of the coordinating bureau of NAM in Bandung in 1995.

In terms of poverty, many countries are becoming worse and worse because the technical competence is not there to tackle the problem. We need to improve the technical capacity of people in order to eradicate poverty. That's what we mean by revitalizing NAM, argued Rofii.

The centre has pinpointed the development of small and medium sized enterprises as a critical area of development. It has been conducting training on micro-financing for small and

medium enterprises in different parts of the world. Bangladesh's Grameen Bank has been a major player in training.

Sudhir Devare, vice chairman of the Delhi-based Information Systems for the Non-Aligned and Other Developing Countries, agreed that it is important to develop the skills of WTO negotiators of NAM countries.

NAM is a good forum to call for collective action in the part of developing countries at WTO, said Devare, who is part of the Indian delegation. He added that his centre works closely with the CSSTC in this endeavour.

"We haven't had the success we hoped for in South-South cooperation in the last two decades," he observed. "In the revitalization of NAM, developing countries must find common ground in moving in areas like reforming the international financial architecture and the process of globalization and movement of world trade." - Dawn/InterPress News Service.