

PM calls for concerted world effort against drugs

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From V.K. CHIN

VIENNA, Wed. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad called on world governments today to make a greater commitment and display a greater political will to act in concert against the drug menace.

The Prime Minister said this after he took the chair as president of the United Nations-sponsored International Conference on Drugs and Illicit Trafficking here.

Just minutes before UN Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar opened the conference, Dr Mahathir was returned unopposed as presi-

dent following the withdrawal of Bolivian Foreign Minister Dr Guillermo Bedregal as candidate.

The opening was delayed by about 90 minutes to enable the Latin American group which supported Dr Bedregal to meet on how to avoid a contest.

Dr Bedregal was subsequently elected unopposed as chairman of the main committee of the conference.

Dr Mahathir said in his opening remarks that the conference should focus on the manifestation of the political will to act in concert

against the drug menace.

He said the significance of this could not be overemphasised. How this manifestation should be expressed was for the conference to formulate, he added.

"Its major significance lies in that governments, henceforth, will be reminded of their commitment expressed at this conference to act together to effectively combat drug abuse and trafficking as a global problem," he said.

"The international drug problem has assumed such scope and extent that an effective campaign against it

cannot be mounted without international co-operation.

"The expression of commitment that must emanate from this conference is important not only as a reference and reminder of a government's moral obligation but it must also be a powerful message to the drug traffickers that their activities cannot continue with impunity and that henceforth there will be a heavy price for them to pay."

He said there was no lack of intention or programme on the part of the UN to deal with this problem. Rather, it had been the inadequate

commitment, the insufficient manifestation of the political will in many producing, transit and consuming countries to act in concert against the common problem that had allowed the rapid spread of drug abuse and illicit trafficking.

He said that according to an unofficial estimate, the size of the global trade in illicit drugs was put at US\$300-billion, a mind-boggling figure.

Part of the adequate response, he said, was perhaps symptomatic of "our indifferent perceptions."

For some governments in

consuming countries, drug abuse and addiction was held to be a social aberration, akin to and on the same level as cigarette smoking and alcoholism, he added.

"A most serious manifestation for a growing number of countries in Latin American, North America and South-East Asia is that the drug problem has become a security problem with implications for the country's continued viability and the maintenance of its national sovereignty," he said.

He said that in the con-

text of national efforts, many countries were already compelled to exert the required political will to act against the drug threat because of dire necessity.

"The experiences of many have also taught us an important lesson, that to effectively counter the drug problem, action must be undertaken in a co-ordinated manner and directed by the highest political level working in tandem with the administrative and judicial system in the country," Dr Mahathir said.

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collaboration in the fight against drug abuse and illicit trafficking had been relatively well developed. But there was still room to increase these regional efforts particularly among States that had become staging posts for the transit of illicit drug consignments in America, Europe, the Middle East and in Asean, he added.

He said one major weakness which the conference could address was the inter-regional co-operation which was still in its early stages or development.

According to him, some impact had also been made by international institutions, such as the UN Fund for Drug Abuse Control, the World Health Organisation and the International Labour Organisation in supplementing the national, regional and inter-regional efforts.

"The drug problem that confronts us is of such magnitude, such complexity, that an effective counter would require our fullest commitment, co-operation and sustained action. Our efforts cannot end here at this conference," he said.

"I envisage the usefulness of follow-up meetings, in particular the convening of inter-regional gatherings of experts and policy-makers to examine in greater detail every aspect of the

drug problem.

"This meeting should be an inspiration for us to follow through at regional and national levels the suggested ways and means of fighting the drug war.

"We must return from this conference with steely resolve to the war at home. The conference is only a success if the joint efforts and co-operation it generates are translated into genuine and sustained action domestically.

"The global war against drug abuse will never be successful if nations continue to maintain passive resistance even after this conference," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the reasons for the rapid spread of the international drug problem had been the failure to reach the minds of the people — to alert them to the real dangers that drug abuse portends and the havoc it could create.

"The tide of the battle cannot be turned around until we have raised that level of awareness that drug kills and that drug destroys," he said.

"We have to correct the fallacy that drug addiction happens only to someone else's child but never ours, that the source of the problem lies in some far-away land but never at home. The battlefield is in each individual household, each community, each country," he added.