

Dr M makes impassioned plea for Commonwealth to act on Bosnia

By Tony Francis

NICOSIA (Cyprus), Thurs. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Commonwealth must help to find an equitable and just solution to Bosnia-Herzegovina if it wants to stand tall and uphold the very principles it had so vehemently lauded in Harare two years ago, that is the protection and promotion of democracy and fundamental human rights.

"Some of us even went so far as to say that where human rights violations are concerned, we have a right to intervene even in the internal affairs of a country," he said at the opening of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting here.

"Yet in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where ethnic cleansing

involves blatant murders and rapes of Bosnian Muslims by Bosnian Serbs aided by the Serbian Government of rump Yugoslavia, the righteousness that some of us display over minor infringements of human rights is remarkably absent."

Instead, he said, the Serbs were to be rewarded with territories they had ethnically cleansed.

"Can we in the Commonwealth who had appealed for outside co-operation to help some of our members in need ignore the Bosnian tragedy and elect to be silent simply because this is not a Commonwealth affair?"

Dr Mahathir was one of the six speakers at the two-hour opening ceremony at the International Confer-

ence Centre here, the others being President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, host of the 1991 CHOGM, Prime Ministers Dame Eugenia Charles of Dominica, P.J. Patterson of Jamaica, and Paul Keating of Australia, and Commonwealth Secre-

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tary-General Chief Emeka Anyaoku.

Earlier, Cyprus President Glafcos Clerides had made his welcoming address to the more than 400 delegates from 47 countries.

Dr Mahathir said that world leaders, in trying to find a solution to the problems in Bosnia-Herzegovina and elsewhere, could useful-

ly draw upon the Commonwealth experience in South Africa.

"Just as we joined forces in bringing pressure to bear on the white South African Government to tear down the walls of apartheid, so can we join forces to bring pressure to bear on the powers who hold the key to the solution of the Bosnian problem," he said.

While the position of Malaysia on Bosnia-Herzegovina is well known, many are inclined to think that it is influenced by a common religion.

To this Dr Mahathir pointed out that Malaysia had been equally active and as vehement in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Cambodia and other non-Muslim communities which faced similar problems.

"We feel strongly when injustice and oppression are perpetrated anywhere," he said, adding that the bloody massacre in Bosnia-Herzegovina turned even the most sturdy of stomachs.

"And all for what? For the sake of territorial aggrandisement. For the sake of ethnic superiority! For the sake of Serbian dream! Enough is enough," he said.

On South Africa's move towards democracy with the first all-race elections scheduled for next April, Dr Mahathir said within the context of Commonwealth political co-operation, it was the greatest success since Harare.

The Commonwealth, he said, had long struggled to dismantle all vestiges of apartheid in South Africa, pursuing it "from CHOGM

to CHOGM with relentless fervour" and keeping the issue under constant scrutiny.

"It is therefore with a great sense of gratification that we, in the Commonwealth, welcome the recent passage of the Bill on the establishment of the Transitional Executive Council by the South African Parliament."

He said while it was an irreversible step that would bring South Africa nearer to the Commonwealth goal of a free, democratic, non-racial and prosperous country, it also could be seen as a determined and genuine desire by its people to see the end of apartheid.

"We are all, I am sure, ready to help South Africa recover from the after effects of sanctions."

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