

PM: Nato must go all out against the Serbs

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) to "go all out" to teach the Serbs so that they will not become too arrogant with their military prowess.

The Prime Minister said Nato's action against the Serbs should have been taken "years ago".

"I feel we have wasted (time) by allowing 37 people to be killed before Nato and the United Nations took action," he said.

He said they had taken a long time to determine who should actually launch the attack "as if the attacks on the Bosnian people were made by the Bosnians themselves".

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after opening a seminar on the civil service here today.

Dr Mahathir also said he had initially felt uneasy over the statement by Rus-

sian President Boris Yeltsin that Nato's attacks on the Serbs were unfair, but he (Yeltsin) did not accuse the Serbs of being wrong when they attacked the Muslims in Bosnia.

Yeltsin, whose country is a traditional ally of former Yugoslavia's Orthodox Serbs, had denounced the heaviest Nato strikes yet against the Serbs.

However, Dr Mahathir said, Russia had changed its stand slightly.

"I hope this time, they will go all out and teach the Serbs."

Dr Mahathir also said Nato should continue with its action against the Serbs "as long as they do not accept the proposed peace plan".

On whether Nato had any better way of handling the situation in Bosnia, he said: "Nato does not have any better way. They should have done this thing years ago ... before 200,000 people

were killed, over 50,000 raped and children lost their legs."

Dr Mahathir added that the Government would not recall its troops in Bosnia.

"Our troops have a specific task. Even if the UN asks us to withdraw we will not pull out."

Dr Mahathir said he would also bring up Malaysia's stand against the use of nuclear weapons at the Commonwealth Heads of Government (Chogm) meeting in November in Auckland, New Zealand.

He said Malaysia would voice its stand on the issue although there were some members of the Commonwealth which had nuclear weapons.

"Our stand is very clear. We do not want nuclear weapons at all and the use of the weapons should also be reviewed as they have led to loss of lives."

On whether Malaysia would raise the Bosnian is-

sue at the meeting, Dr Mahathir said: "We will see".

At another function, Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Malaysia welcomed the Nato air strikes, adding that the decisive action would prompt the Serbs to come to the negotiating table to resolve the conflict peacefully.

However, he warned that the UN should continue to maintain its decisive stand, otherwise the Serbian aggressors would continue the pursuit of their military strategy to bring a military end to the war.

"The air strikes by Nato has sent a message to the Serbs that it is better that they come to the negotiating table and talk.

"This is because the continuing bombardment of Sarajevo or placing their entire hopes on military attacks is not going to bring an end to the Bosnian conflict."

Abdullah was speaking at Wisma Putra after Australian Minister for Trade, Senator Bob McMullan, called on him today.

Asked if Nato's action had changed his opinion of the UN's role in Bosnia Herzegovina, Abdullah said it had certainly given Malaysia some hope and was a little more optimistic now in terms of what could be achieved in resolving the conflict peacefully.

Abdullah said the latest Nato action in Bosnia had proven Malaysia's stand that if the UN and Nato were prepared to use military power decisively then the Serbs would recognise how serious the UN was in its intention to seek a quick end to the conflict.

He said that as soon as the Serbian Parliament knew that Nato was going to conduct massive air strikes against Serbian positions, the Serbian Parliament decided to agree to the US

peace plan.

Abdullah said this was something the Serbs had never done as they had always rejected any peace plan.

On whether the increased Nato involvement might lead to a scaling of the war and the danger of a protracted involvement of Nato in the conflict, Abdullah said it depended on how Nato was going to conduct its military operations.

"I think Nato knows very well that they will not want to expand or allow the conflict to go beyond Bosnia Herzegovina and that is very much on their minds."

Asked if the military action by Nato would have any implication on the Organisation of Islamic Conference Contact Group meeting here, Abdullah said the group would have to take this into account.

He said there were no plans at the moment to shelve the meeting.