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Malaysia-Kosovo

MALAYSIA WANTS BIG POWERS TO INTERVENE IN KOSOVO CONFLICT

KUALA LUMPUR, April 3 (Bernama) -- Malaysia today called on the international community particularly the European powers, Russia and the United States to persuade the Serbian leadership to enter into negotiations with the Albanian leadership in Kosovo for the future of the troubled region.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the Serbian leadership should be prepared to discuss all relevant issues including the thorny issue of independence.

"If Belgrade refuses to negotiate with the Kosovo Albanians along these lines, the powers-that-be should be willing to isolate the regime.

"The alternative to genuine negotiations which will address both the grievances of the Albanians and the concerns of the Serbs is a long, protracted war," Anwar said when opening the "Consultation On Kosovo" forum here today.

Anwar said governments all over the world should understand this and should pressure the regime under Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milosevic to begin a sincere dialogue with the Albanians of Kosovo.

The predominantly Muslim province was the scene of a recent crackdown by Yugoslav police against alleged separatists in which some 80 people were killed.

Serbian police claimed that they were "terrorists" killed in a campaign against the Kosovo Liberation Army, a group trying to win independence for the southern province.

Anwar said while Malaysia and its people understood the aspirations of the Kosovo Albanians, they also took cognizance of the fact that territorial integrity was the cornerstone of a modern, sovereign state.

He said the complexity of the Kosovo conflict challenged the world to find a just and lasting solution because unlike the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina or Croatia, the conflict in Kosovo "is capable of burning the whole of the Balkans in a huge conflagration".

Alluding to the Bosnian conflict, Anwar said the international community, especially the western powers, had failed to act with any sense of urgency, resulting in 200,000 people being killed and 50,000 women raped.

He said: "The world failed to stop the aggression because it lacked the will. Let not the political will, narrow political or sectarian interest or some sophisticated political gain encourage yet another reign of terror".

"Let not our generation be a helpless witness to yet another bloodbath in the Balkans," Anwar said.

In this regard, he said it was worth observing that inter-ethnic political ties in Malaysia, which Anwar described as one of the most complex multi-ethnic societies in the world, were forged through negotiations in the years before independence.

Anwar said through negotiations and dialogues, Malaysia had attained a certain equilibrium in the relations between the different communities which took into account the needs and aspiration of the various ethnic groups.

"This is why whenever the ethnic equilibrium is disturbed, the government has demonstrated in no uncertain terms its willingness to act with firmness and fairness to restore the balance.

"The ability to be fair but firm in a crisis is one of the most vital

ingredients of leadership in a multi-ethnic society such as Malaysia," he said.

Anwar also told the gathering that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had expressed his hope that the forum would come up with concrete suggestions on how to solve the Kosovo conflict. -- BERNAMA

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