

'Talks for nuclear disarmament urgent'

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PM: Nations shouldn't be blinded by narrow interests

KUALA LUMPUR: There is an urgent need for international dialogue to find an effective multilateral approach to achieve nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said this was important now, especially when there was a propensity for some countries to unilaterally judge others as developing or having intentions to develop nuclear weapons without regard for the findings of, or recourse to, the authority of the multilateral agencies empowered to make such judgments.

"We have seen how biased such a unilateral judgment can be. If a state developing such weapons is an ally, no action is taken to curb the development or possession or to institute controls.

"If (it is) not an ally, the full military might and fury of those countries would be brought to bear upon the state concerned," he said at the International Nuclear Conference 2002 here.

Mahathir said the world should not be blinded by narrow national interests in pursuing such dialogue.

He said as a result of a propensity to unilaterally act as an international prosecutor, judge and jury, there was now a threat from these countries to launch pre-emptive military strikes on countries alleged to have nuclear facilities, with the current war on terrorism serving as a convenient excuse.

"Such lack of clear moral standing between pushing for nuclear export control and striving for nuclear disarmament will lead to a downward spiral, to the detriment of global nuclear non-proliferation objectives," he said.

He said the unilateral actions would cause more states to feel threatened, leading some of them to retaliate by resorting to acts of terrorism and perhaps even nuclear terrorism.

"Even more dangerous is when the threatened states are those that are predominantly populated by people of a particular faith.

"This will lead to a perceived escalation in the victimisation of countries and people of that faith, following similar widespread perception in the context of the global war on terrorism," he said.

Mahathir said Malaysia, being a Muslim country adhering to the funda-

mental teachings of Islam, would pursue inter-faith dialogues to promote global peace and security, but the downward spiral on matters concerning nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament would undermine such efforts.

He said the rightful forum for the international dialogue, namely the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conferences, had not been effective.

Similarly, the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva had been stalled by the reluctance of the nuclear weapon states and their nuclear-umbrella states to link the issue of developing a time-table for nuclear disarmament to, initially, that of banning nuclear weapon tests and, currently, that of cutting off the production of fissile nuclear material, he said.

Asked which country he was referring to as being biased, Mahathir said: "I don't want to be specific, but one of the things I do know is that there is no pressure on Israel to do away with its nuclear weapons, but there is so much pressure on other countries."

He said unilateral actions against Iraq, for example, were based on the possibility that the country was a nuclear proliferating state.

"If you attack a country because of possibilities, then every country is going to be attacked. They should attack Israel."

Mahathir said Malaysia's allies were mainly countries that wanted to see peace and did not care for nuclear weapons.