

Hold anti-war demos, says PM

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Mass protests can influence govts, NGOs told

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BY SIM LEOI LEOI 6 FEB 2003

PUTRAJAYA: Non-governmental organisations throughout the world have been asked to mobilise the people to demonstrate and influence their governments to protest against the possibility of a US-led attack on Iraq.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said these groups should take measures to influence the policies and decisions of their governments not to accept war as a solution to the current crisis.

"Not all NGOs are only fighting for animal rights and against the use of fur. Some NGOs are against war and I'm referring to them.

"We hope these groups can mobilise their people and ultimately change their governments' policies. You may remember that during the Vietnam War in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the first protests were very small.

"But they gathered momentum until millions were demonstrating against the war and that was only in the United States," he told reporters after receiving an 11-member Palestinian delegation at Seri Perdana yesterday.

These NGOs, he added, understood that war would have terrible consequences, that its victims were usually innocent civilians and that there must be some form of negotiated peace.

Dr Mahathir hoped the same effects of such protests during the Vietnam War - when the United States had to ultimately withdraw its troops, could be achieved as there appeared to be an anti-war movement throughout the world.

"Today, I believe there is going to be a demonstration in London.

"Basically, I am against demonstrations but in this case, Malaysia has to show our oneness with the other people who are taking a stand to protest against the war. So that is why we hope that Peace Malaysia (the Malaysians for Peace Alliance) will organise a similar demonstration in an orderly fashion," he said.

There were reports of massive anti-war rallies by protesters held in many countries, including the United States, Britain, Australia and other European countries.

Organisers expect millions to turn up around the world in the biggest anti-war protests ever.

Dr Mahathir said that unlike the anti-American demonstration held outside the embassy here yesterday, which was merely to express the anger of Malaysians, the Peace Malaysia rally would help to "give vent to our feelings against war."

He said there was no need for local NGOs to go to such an extent because the Government wanted to show Americans that they were safe in the country.

On the report tabled by the United Nations weapons inspection team to the Security Council, Dr Mahathir said it showed there was no clear-cut conclusion whether Iraq was harbouring weapons.

"They are saying that Iraq is not co-operating. I don't know how the Iraqis should go about co-operating with the inspection team because apparently, it is already showing everything it has to show.

"But they are still saying that Iraq has something, but is not showing it to the team. If they know (where these weapons are hidden), then they should just go there," he pointed out.

■ Double standards 'sickening' — P5