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Mahathir-war

WE ARE IN MIDST OF WORLD WAR III, WARNS MAHATHIR

By: Azman Ujang

DAVOS, Jan 24 (Bernama) -- The 33rd World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting here kicked off Thursday with a warning from the Malaysian Prime Minister that the world is in the midst of the Third World War.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in his trademark blunt, rebuke of the hypocrisy and double-standards that characterized the conduct of some of the world's powerful nations, told government and business leaders attending the six-day meeting that the war was not against terrorists but between terrorists and the "peace-loving" anti-terrorists alliance.

Without naming the two-sides involved in the war, Dr Mahathir said it was between the Axis of Evil and Satan.

"But both sides are convinced that they are right, that theirs is the fight against evil. Evil and Satan must be destroyed," he said in the opening plenary session on "Trust and Governance for a New Era". Dr Mahathir was one of six speakers at the session.

He was given a loud applause when he said: "I don't believe in saying nice things, I rather say what I feel and deal with it".

Dr Mahathir said being frightened, the world was taking measures to secure and defend at tremendous cost but the main result was not security or freedom from terror attacks.

"The main result is to disrupt life, undermine investments and business and generally to adversely affect economic growth worldwide," he said in remarks seen by conference observers as directed against the United States which was preparing to launch war against Iraq for what it says is a move to disarm the beleaguered nation of weapons of mass destruction.

The impending war on Iraq is casting a dark shadow over the mood of the meeting here with the US sending a powerful delegation led by Secretary of State Colin Powell and including Attorney-General John Ashcroft. Also attending is former President Bill Clinton.

The prime minister also warned that the war was going to be a long one because hatred, anger and bitterness ruled both sides.

As he put it: "We both want revenge. We both will retaliate. You kill our people, we kill your people and vice versa. And it will go on and on. Sanity has deserted both sides."

He said that people everywhere now live in fear of terrorists, and the terrorists, their supporters or alleged supporters also live in fear.

"We fear flying, we fear travelling to certain countries, we fear nightclubs, we fear letters, parcels and cargo containers, we fear white powder, shoes, Muslims, penknives, metal cutlery."

In an obvious reference to Iraq, "they, the other side, fear sanctions, starvation, shortage of medicines. They fear military invasion, being bombed and rocketed, captured and detained."

Dr Mahathir said that even people who were neutral or not involved or innocent also live in fear.

Describing such people as collaterals just as in the case of Afghan and Iraqi civilians, he said that the passengers on the hijacked plane and those people working in the World Trade Centre in New York on Sept 11, 2001 were also collaterals.

The prime minister said that although the world had become small and said to be a village, people had not made much progress in its management.

He likened the situation to the Stone Age when men with the biggest clubs ruled and in the modern and sophisticated global village, the country

with the biggest "killing power" ruled.

Dr Mahathir, who was given an applause lasting five to seven minutes after his prepared remarks, in a tinge of regret, said: "When the Cold War ended, we thought that the world would see peace and prosperity. After all, the people who believe in peace and universal justice won."

Referring to the much-touted unipolar world following the end of the Cold War, he said that the loss of a counterbalance had resulted in the great exponent of justice and fair play to become unbalanced.

While the communists were there, the capitalists curbed their greed and avarice and showed a friendly face.

"But now there is no more other side. The friendly face of capitalism is not needed anymore.

"Now capitalists can do what they like and what they like is simply to make more money for themselves," he said.

He also spoke of the collapse of giant US corporations like Enron, Global Crossing, Arthur Andersen and United Airlines in an era when big was considered beautiful again and big was good.

"Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that the big will not cheat, will not fall, will not go bankrupt."

The prime minister also said the disparity between the rich countries and the poor ones was greater than ever with the richest having a per capita income of more than US\$30,000 and the poorest less than US\$300.

Of the world's six billion population, he said, one billion were underfed, underclothed and without a roof over their heads, many scrounging in rubbish heaps for food, clothings and materials for their shelter.

On human rights, Dr Mahathir said that people talk a lot about it and about the sanctity of human lives and were opposed to death penalties.

"But actually, whole populations have been sentenced to death and in many instances the sentence has been carried out. When war is declared against a country, a death sentence is passed on the people and when war is executed, the sentence is carried out. And yet we talk glibly about the sanctity of life."

Dr Mahathir said that the exploitation of the world by the greedy, the double standards and the hypocrisy about human rights and respect for human lives, oppression of the weak by the strong, disregard for human sufferings, expropriation of other people's land and the expulsion of people had all been aggravated by the end of the Cold War and the victory of the righteous over the evil.

"With the onset of this Third World War, the world is in a state of turmoil. We now live in fear, even the rich is not as prosperous any more while the poor are actually poorer."

On the theme of the plenary session, he said: "We have not made such a good job managing this global village of ours. There's no trust and no good governance."

The prime minister said that trust and good governance could not be created in the new era by seeking for a military defeat of the enemy and forcing them to submit.

Painting a picture of the outcome of such a war, he said: "The forces against the 'axis of evil' are not going to win because the target is wrong. All that can happen if they are defeated is to create more anger and a call for more revenge and retaliation by the people who are incensed by the injustice they believed they are experiencing."

"On the other hand, the other side is not going to win either. The enemy is just too big and too powerful."

Dr Mahathir sees compromise as the only solution, and for this, there ought to be the building of trust and this must be initiated by the good people.

Turning to the Sept 11 attacks and other acts of terrorism, he said:
"They must recognise that people do not tie bombs to their bodies or crash their plane for the fun of it. They must have a reason for it.

"We have to identify the reason and to remove them. Our terrorising the terrorists will not work. But removing the causes of terrorism will."

He called for a paradigm shift and a new mindset to put an end to this Third World War, saying that what was needed was a victory for both in which both sides would benefit.

"The world is big enough and rich for everyone. There is no need to take everything for ourselves. A win-win solution is possible."

Dr Mahathir was confident that if people could overcome anger, the craving for revenge and unlimited greed, they could manage the world and achieve trust and eventually good governance.

During the question-and-answer session that followed, the prime minister spoke of the United States and the kind of trust he had for the superpower.

"Initially, my trust on the US was absolute. But recently, this trust is at a very low level," he said.

A US Republican Senator from Ohio, Robert Portman, who also spoke at the plenary session described Dr Mahathir's remarks as very powerful.

"I'm glad that you have made the statement here," he said.

Other speakers at the session chaired by David R.Gergen of Harvard University were former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Carey of Clifton, DuPont USA chief executive officer Charles O.Holliday Jr and executive director of Human Rights Watch of the US, Kenneth Roth.

The prime minister is due to participate in two more sessions Friday.

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