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PM: World living in fear (HL)

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THE "Third World War" has begun, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, but it is not the war against terrorists. Rather, it is a war being fought by peace-loving peoples against perceptions of evil.

Referring to the conflict between the United States Government and its so-called "axis of evil", Dr Mahathir said it would be a long war because both sides sought revenge.

"Hatred, anger and bitterness rule (their) hearts. (Both) want revenge. (Both) will retaliate.

"You kill our people, we will kill your people and vice versa," he said at the plenary session of the World Economic Forum.

Speaking on "Trust and Governance for a New Era", Dr Mahathir said sanity had deserted both sides. "In this `war' both sides are convinced that they are right, that theirs is the fight against evil. Evil and Satan must be destroyed.

"We now live in fear, every one of us," Dr Mahathir said. "We fear the terrorists, and the terrorists, their supporters or alleged supporters fear us. We fear flying, we fear travelling to certain countries, we fear night clubs, we fear letters, parcels and cargo containers, we fear white powder, shoes, Muslims, pen knives, metal, cutlery, etc."

The other side, he said, feared "sanctions, starvation, shortage of medicine. They fear military invasion, being bombed and rocketed, being captured and detained".

"People who are neutral, not involved (and) innocent live in fear too. They are the `collaterals'. Just as the Afghans and the Iraqi civilians are collaterals. The passengers on the hijacked planes and those people working in the World Trade Towers were also collaterals."

A frightened world is taking security and defensive measures at tremendous cost. Even so, the Prime Minister told the packed hall of business luminaries, politicians and NGOs, the main result is not security or freedom from terror.

"The main result is to disrupt life, undermine investments and business and generally to adversely affect economic growth world wide.

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

"We have not done such a good job managing this Global Village of ours. There is no trust and no good governance."

Dr Mahathir said the world needs "a new mindset, if we are going to put an end to this Third World War.

"We need victory for both, a victory where both sides will win".

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

The Prime Minister said: "If we overcome our anger and hatred, our craving for revenge, our unlimited greed, we can manage the world and achieve trust and eventually good governance".

In answer to a question on creating trust and good governance in the new era, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't think it can be done by seeking a military defeat of the enemy and forcing them to submit.

"The forces against the `axis of evil' are not going to win because the target is wrong," he said. "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 believe 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 said the only solution was through compromise.

He told the audience that the causes needed to be identified and removed. "Out-terrorising the terrorists will not work. But removing the causes for terrorism will."

Dr Mahathir received a five-minute ovation at the end of his remarks.

Later asked to explain his statement on the "Third World War", Dr Mahathir said it was President George Bush who after Sept 11 had declared that "we are at war. And he is right."

It might not be the conventional war, the Prime Minister added, "but people are being killed and people are being threatened with attack and people are fighting back and in the process a lot of people are losing life and limb.

"This is a new kind of war. A real full-scale conventional war would destroy the world, what with all the nuclear warheads. Accept it and try to deal with it rather than say nice words and say that it is not war but just action. It is war."