

13/05/2003

PM lauds Schroeder's anti-war stand

Ashraf Abdullah; Sarban Singh

PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today congratulated German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder for his Government's "very principled stand" against the invasion of Iraq.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia was heartened to see that Germany and a few other European nations still believed in the United Nations and international consensus.

"When international law and conventions are ignored by the very people who formulated and promoted them, then there will be international anarchy.

"Weak nations cannot be expected to submit to international laws and conventions if their security is threatened," he said at a dinner held in honour of Schroeder, who is on a three-day official visit to Malaysia.

Schroeder, who is leading a 17-member delegation, is the first German chancellor to visit Malaysia. After Malaysia, he visits Singapore, Indonesia and Vietnam.

His entourage comprises Economics and Labour Minister Wolf-gang Clement and German Industry Committee for Asia-Pacific chairman Heinrich von Pierer.

Germany is Malaysia's largest trading partner in the European Union.

Schroeder was reciprocating Dr Mahathir's visit to Germany in March last year.

Germany, France and Russia were among the countries in Europe which had opposed the invasion of Iraq by the United States and Britain.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia looked to Germany and other like-minded countries to restore confidence in the UN and in international law.

He said small countries lived in fear of not just terrorists but of unilateral actions by powerful countries.

"We can expect no protection from international organisations like the UN since powerful countries like the United States and Britain can attack Iraq without the sanction of the UN."

He said the tension and turmoil in the world had their roots in the decision to expropriate Arab Palestinian territory to create the state of Israel.

Ever since then, he said, there had been no peace in the Middle East.

"And now that instability has spilled over to every corner of the world. It is certainly the cause of worldwide terrorism that we see today," he said.

He said the world should try to identify and remove the causes of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

"But instead, we see an attempt to out-terrorise the terrorists to deter them.

"Now countries are being threatened and invaded even though there is no proof of their involvement in terrorism."

He said the attack against Iraq was seen by the Muslim world as an attempt to terrify Muslim nations.

Terrorists, he said, were not under the control of governments and neither were they always in their own countries.

"They may be anywhere, in the UK, for example, and as desperate and angry people, they will not be deterred," he said.

The war against terrorism would not be successful even if all Muslim countries were subjugated, he said.

On another note, he said the out-break of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome had created havoc with the economies of East Asia and the world and new diseases were also appearing more frequently.

"Our responses to these outbreaks have been haphazard. There is real danger of these diseases and new ones spreading worldwide."

He added that new strategies needed to be formulated to deal with this scourge.

He said it would be good if a fraction of the funds used for weapons development was set aside for the setting up of centres worldwide that could quickly respond to new diseases.

On bilateral relations, he said Malaysia was keen to see more German investments for the benefit of both nations.

In his speech, Schroeder said both nations should do everything within their power to counter anti-Islamic and anti-Western sentiment.

"Only through a peaceful reconciliation of interests based on tolerance and mutual respect can we guarantee long-term security and prosperity," he said.

Germany, he said, was confident that Malaysia could continue to contribute to regional stability and take a decisive stance against terrorism and religious fanaticism.

"Your country can draw on its tradition of tolerance and its harmonious diversity, thereby continuing to be an example for other multi-religious and multi-ethnic countries," he said.

He was also pleased that German companies had been able to contribute to Malaysia's impressive economic growth.

"The connection between work and further training is the main task of our model bilateral project, the German-Malaysian Institute.

More than 20 German higher educational institutions were carrying out co-operative projects with Malaysian universities, he added.