

Thatcher issues urgent plea on arms

From Julian Haviland

Budapest

Mrs Margaret Thatcher last night assured the leaders of Hungary and their Soviet allies that the West wants urgent agreement on reducing arms.

She called for immediate resumption of the Geneva negotiations, and invited the Soviet bloc to follow Britain's lead by abolishing chemical weapons.

The Prime Minister, who was speaking in Budapest on her first official visit to a member country of the Warsaw Pact, said that one great test of leadership in the past 16 years, before the next millenium would be the imagination and determination brought to the tasks of arms control and disarmament. It would require both political will and mutual respect.

"Mutual respect, for it is useless to suppose that East or West will agree to dismantle weapons unless at every stage we are left with a balance which preserves our security." Both sides must be ready to adopt practicable measures and to have them verified, and each must recognize the other's need for security.

"In Budapest tonight I stress that Britain and her allies positively want agreements to reduce arms," the Prime Minister continued. "The need is urgent. Weapons that were fiction yesterday are fact today, and will be overtaken tomorrow.

"This is no time for empty chairs in Geneva. This is the time to talk, to negotiate, to succeed."

Mrs Thatcher was replying at a banquet in Budapest's parliament buildings to a speech in which Mr Gyorgy Lazar, Hungary's Prime Minister, blamed the deployment of American nussiles for aggravating political and military tension in Europe. The situation had compelled the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact to take counter-measures, he said.

But Mr Lazar's words were no more than a conventional reproof in a warmly welcoming speech in which the main message was a plea for even closer commercial and economic relations between Hungary and Britain.

Hungary, ever more dependent on her commerce with the West, wants to rectify the imbalance in her trade with Britain. Figures published yesterday showed its export to Britain at £53m last year, with imports from Britain at £92m.

In a full day, Mrs Thatcher fitted in some four-and-a-half hours of talks. Central, but confidential, was her two hours alone with Mr Janos Kadar, aged 71, the First Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party.

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The tough old Communist who worked with the Russians to crush the 1956 rebellion, once hated now deeply respected, beamed on his guest as they shook hands for the cameras. They chatted about the Danube fog, which spoiled Mrs Thatcher's sight-seeing.

Three hours before, on a wet grey morning, she had laid a wreath at the Heroes Monument. It is overlooked by the Yugoslav embassy, where Imre Nagy, Prime Minister of the brief revolutionay government, vainly sought sanctuary in

October 1956 before being seized by the Russians, tried and executed with Mr Kadar's full approval.

Not surprisingly, Mrs Thatcher has been repeating here that she wants to look forward, not back. Her talks with Mr Kadar were said to have been open, constructive and valuable.

She told a BBC interviewer yesterday that her presence in Budapest was the first step in the long process of trying to reach a new understanding.

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