

Malaysia will accept criticism, but not strong-arm tactics

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Dr M cautions Clinton

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From Hardev Kaur

WASHINGTON, Sat. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has cautioned the United States against using strong-arm tactics in getting countries in Asia to accede to its perspective of what is right or wrong.

He said it was essential to allow the natural forces within these societies to evolve towards their desired objectives, whether in regard to human rights or democracy.

The region is culturally very developed and the societies there are very resilient, he told President Bill Clinton during their first meeting at the White House.

Clinton went out of his way to assure the Prime Minister that it was not his policy to try to dominate, but that he was looking for partnership with Malaysia and other countries in the region.

He said he was looking to "leadership without dominance" and asked the Prime Minister on how the US could conceptualise this.

Dr Mahathir told him it was possible for countries like Malaysia to accept criticisms of what was seen as right or wrong from an American perspective, as much as Malaysia itself as a country had not hesitated from saying what was right and what was wrong to other countries on major issues.

Foreign Trips

President Clinton said he admired Dr Mahathir's leadership "very much" and sought his advice on several issues.

"I admire the incredible accomplishment of his nation under his leadership over the past several years," Clinton said in the Oval Office of the White House yesterday before the two leaders started their discussions.

He said this when asked what he thought of Dr Mahathir now that he had met him personally after "missing" him in Seattle last November. Clinton had hosted an informal meeting of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) meeting in Seattle.

Dr Mahathir, asked about the meeting later, said: "We had very useful discussions on many issues...and I think as a result of this meeting the relationship between Malaysia and the US will be easier."

The 70-minute meeting saw the two leaders "agreeing on most things".

Clinton, who had asked for the meeting with Dr Mahathir, expressed his gratitude to Malaysia for the "contributions that have been made by Malaysia to the operations in Bosnia and in Somalia and for being a responsible leader in world affairs".

Malaysian forces helped rescue 70 United States Rangers trapped at Bakara Market in south Mogadishu

But he drew the line between what was criticism and what was arm twisting.

Malaysian Permanent Representative to the UN Tan Sri Razali Ismail, who briefed the Press after the meeting, said that Dr Mahathir told Clinton "if you go beyond criticism and take actions in order to force us to bow to your demands than you are twisting our arms and that we will not accept".

The Prime Minister cautioned the US President about such tendencies in Asia.

last October during which one Malaysian army personnel was killed. Even as a small developing country Malaysia has 1,500 army personnel among the UN peace keeping forces in Bosnia, and 900 in Somalia.

This was the first meeting between Clinton and Dr Mahathir. The US President had in fact expressed a desire to meet the Prime Minister in Seattle last year when he said "I would like to meet Dr Mahathir..."

Today at the start of the meeting he said: "We have got a lot to talk about and I

am looking forward to it."

Even though this was an unofficial working visit for Dr Mahathir, the Clinton Administration rolled out the red carpet for the visitor. Earlier this morning the Prime Minister had a working breakfast with congressional leaders, including the Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole and Senate majority leader George Mitchell.

During the open session of the meeting, which lasted for about an hour, the Economic Adviser to the Government Tun Daim Zainud-

din, Malaysian Ambassador to the US Datuk Majid Mohamad, Malaysia's Permanent Representative to the UN Tan Sri Razali Ismail and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Datuk Jaluiddin Bahadun were present.

On the American side, in addition to Clinton were Vice-President Al Gore, Secretary of State Warren Christopher and chairman of the National Security Council Anthony Lake.

The second part of the meeting was essentially a

"four-eyed" one with the two leaders left on their own.

During the 70-minute meeting Clinton listened to Dr Mahathir "very intently" and sought his (Dr Mahathir's) advice on a number of issues, including Bosnia, South Africa and especially in dealing with countries in Asia and specifically in the context of what Clinton termed as trying to establish "a credible partnership with the countries in Asia".

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