

30 JUL 1997

Mahathir-Charter

MAHATHIR: REVIEW WILL NOT DILUTE HUMAN RIGHTS DECLARATION

LANGKAWI, July 30 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia's call for a review of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights will not in any way dilute it but rather redress the unsympathetic view of human rights problems in developing countries.

In defending Kuala Lumpur's stand, he took to task countries which criticised Malaysia such as the United States for stamping their human rights standards on others but were blind to their own weaknesses.

Against such a backdrop and the fact that the 1948 UN Declaration on Human Rights was outdated, he said Malaysia would continue to call for a review of the declaration.

"There is no question of diluting it (the Human Rights Declarations)," he said.

The next step would be to convince other countries on the need for a review, he told reporters upon arrival at the Langkawi International Airport to attend the concluding session of the third Langkawi International Dialogue 1997.

Dr Mahathir was responding to US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's statements that the US would resist any attempts to dilute the declaration which she claimed was accepted as a universal benchmark for protection of human rights.

He said: "In the US, the Blacks and the Hispanics are not well treated, some people are extremely poor, they cannot get jobs and even in the due process of law, there is bias...so where is freedom in the US."

In emphasising individual freedom at all costs, he said, the West would rather see people starved than allow for a stable government.

"They would rather have governments changed, have demonstrations in the streets and strikes. To them, it is important, but to us the welfare of our people is important," he said.

Dr Mahathir said people, who unnecessarily undermined the peace and stability in Malaysia and caused sufferings for the poor, should not be allowed to get away scot free.

Asked in what way Malaysia's proposal for the review of the human rights charter would be more balanced, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia wanted guarantee for freedom of the majority and not subject to individual acts which destabilised the country.

"...whereas the West believes that the individual is supreme irrespective of what happens to the majority of the people...they cannot even do business, cannot work because of so called expressions of individual freedom," he said.

Dr Mahathir said whether the West would accept Malaysia's view or not was a different matter.

But in countries like Malaysia, where stability was important, it was also important to give a good life to the people.

"The good life of our people is as much a right of the people which is as much a part of human rights as the individual's right. And the individual's rights cannot include the right to destabilise and undermine the lives of other people," he said.

Dr Mahathir said there were other things to human rights than mere individual freedom.

He said: "We have to look at the whole thing...at what is human rights."

Todate, he said, Asean and China shared a common concern over pressure from the big powers on developing nations to the extent they were afraid of making their stand.

This was also a human rights issue since the big powers could do anything whereas the weaker nations could not, he said.

On the kind of action that could be taken against speculators in view of US financier George Soros' attacks on Asean currencies, he said: "What action can we take, he is in America, we are not a superpower, if we are, we can send our army to America, catch him, bring him here and break him."

On views that the foreign exchange market was a free market and how action, if any, could be taken against speculators, Dr Mahathir retorted: "Free for crooks, you see, a free market is for people who do normal trading, we are quite happy (with that), market forces we accept."

"...but a person who deliberately comes because he is rich and undermines the economy of the country, that is not freedom," he said.

Asked on Albright's views in Singapore that Dr Mahathir was harsh on his stand on the US, he said: "That is her right, I have my rights also, even giving an opinion she describes as harsh." -- BERNAMA

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