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UN charter review: Malaysia to convince 'friends'

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LANGKAWI, Wed. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said a review of the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights was needed because of the existence of a "very unsympathetic view of human rights problems in developing countries".

Rejecting US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's suggestion that the move to submit a proposal to review the declaration was an attempt to dilute it, the Prime Minister said that Malaysia would talk and convince its "friends" that the declaration needed a review.

Although Asean had expressed support for the review, Dr Mahathir was concerned that the superpowers would pressure the developing countries in order to scare and prevent them (developing countries) from stating their stand on the matter.

"It is not a question of diluting (the declaration). There is a very unsympathetic view of human rights problem in developing countries.

"They would rather see people starve than allow for a stable government...they would rather have governments changed, demonstrations in the streets and strikes and all that, which is to them important but to us the welfare of our people is important.

"People who unnecessarily undermine the peace and stability of a country cannot be allowed to get away scot-free when the people who suffer are the poor," Dr Mahathir said, when asked to comment on the United States and European Union's objections to any move to review the declaration.

He was asked by reporters to comment on the matter upon his arrival at the Langkawi International Airport to attend the final day of the third Langkawi International Dialogue.

On Sunday, Dr Mahathir said that Malaysia might submit a proposal to review the UN declaration.

He added that the 50-year old declaration was no longer suitable and that Malaysia regarded the West's insistence that developing countries conform to their ideals on human rights as oppression.

Yesterday, Albright said she would fight any attempt to dilute the human rights declaration.

Dr Mahathir said there was a need to look at the whole thing and "what is human rights.

"There are other things in human rights than mere individual freedom," he added.

Dr Mahathir said he wanted to see that the freedom of the majority was guaranteed and that individual rights cannot include the right to destabilise and undermine the lives of other people.

"People cannot do business or even work because of the so called expression of individual freedom...so that is our view; whether the world will accept or not is a different matter.

"But in countries like ours where stability is important in order to give a good life to our people, we consider the good life of the people as much a part of human rights," he added.

Dr Mahathir also criticised the US for not exercising the form of human rights that it claimed to preach.

"You know in the US the blacks and Hispanics are not well treated even in their due process of law...sometimes they are biased, so where is the freedom in the US?

"Some people are extremely poor and cannot get jobs," he added.

Asked what Malaysia would do next in order to push its idea of reviewing the declaration, he said: "We have to convince our friends that there is a need for a review."

On Asean support for the review, the Prime Minister said he was concerned that the superpowers would pressure the developing countries against showing their stand on the matter.

He added that such a form of suppression of the weak countries was also a form of human rights violation.

Asked whether Malaysia would use the Asean and Apec forum to get support for the move to review the declaration, Dr Mahathir said: "Well, we'll try."

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