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Advice to human rights champions

Zainul Arifin in Montego Bay, Jamaica

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has urged champions of human rights to look beyond their narrow definition of the subject and address abuses that have escaped their scrutiny.

He cited, for example, acts of terrorism committed by some countries abroad when trying to further their objectives.

Their acts had affected the rights of people in those nations and resulted in deaths.

Dr Mahathir said human rights also included the right to be employed and to earn a living, both of which had been eroded after the Asian financial crisis.

"Recently, due to actions taken by people outside of Malaysia, many people in Malaysia who were enjoying human rights have been deprived of these rights," he told reporters on Friday after the Group of 15 developing countries three-day summit here.

The Prime Minister has always stressed on the social consequences of the actions of financial market players, including throwing millions into poverty.

"We believe that if you want to tackle human rights, we should tackle it worldwide. This should involve all countries and state terrorism."

Asked by a reporter whether he was referring to the United States, Dr Mahathir said:

"As far as the name of the countries that are involved in state terrorism, I don't think it is very diplomatic to name the states you are free to make assumptions of your own."

The US has been known to take unilateral action, such as sending its troops to other countries to further its domestic agenda.

"Unfortunately when people talk about human rights they are rather biased in their definition of human rights," Dr Mahathir said.

"They think that what they are doing is, of course, not contravening human rights, especially if that happens in some other country."

Dr Mahathir left on Friday for a one-day visit to France to meet President Jacques Chirac. He is scheduled to stop in Amman, Jordan, to meet King Abdullah and pay his condolences to the family on the death of King Hussein.

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