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G15-Rights

MAHATHIR SAYS PRESENT DEFINITION OF HUMAN RIGHTS BIASED

By: Kuah Guan Oo

MONTEGO BAY (Jamaica), Feb 13 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that the present definition of human rights is biased while Prime Minister P.J. Patterson of Jamaica said that it should include the social, economic and political rights of the people and nations.

Answering questions raised at a joint news conference at the close of the summit of the G-15 grouping of developing countries here Friday, Dr Mahathir said in Malaysia recently, people who had been enjoying their human rights had been deprived of their right to earn a livelihood as a result of action taken by some people outside the country.

"Unfortunately, when people talk about human rights, they are rather biased in their definition. We think that what we are doing is of course not contravening human rights.

"But we believe that if you want to tackle the issue of human rights worldwide, then it should involve all countries of the world. It should also involve the question of state terrorism where some states had taken action which resulted in people being killed in furtherance of their policies," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who was asked to name the states concerned, said he did not have to name the states. "But you are free to make your own assumption," he said, to the applause of the audience of foreign and trade ministers, officials and journalists.

The G-15 comprising Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela, Jamaica, Algeria, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Zimbabwe, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Sri Lanka ended its three-day summit Friday.

Patterson, who is the outgoing chairman of the group, said all the G-15 countries subscribed to all the international conventions on human rights but its definition should include the economic, social and political rights of the people and nations.

He said they specifically say that certain aspects of the question of human rights should fall under the appropriate convention and not in others. For example, he said, the question of labour should fall under the International Labour Organisation and not the World Trade Organisation.

To another question, Patterson said the G-15 did not think that the International Monetary Fund was currently suited for its role as the lender of last resort, that its resources were inadequate to make it a lender of last resort and that its uniform solution to financially-troubled countries can compare to a situation where the doctor prescribes the same treatment whatever the malady.

The G-15, he said, felt that the IMF remedy should be suited to individual local condition.

He also said the current financial crisis was still unfolding and he referred to the speech of Dr Mahathir during the opening ceremony on the effects of the crisis. "Some countries woke rich in the morning but went to bed poor at night," said Patterson.

The Jamaican prime minister said the imports and exports of countries around the world were affected by the crisis and had reached a situation "where we say that the poor catch pneumonia while the rich risks infection."

He said the G-15 and other developing countries would not be taken seriously if they were to approach the question of reforms of the world financial system in a fragmented way, but acting together in a concerted

way, they would have the capacity and potential to effect a change. "The change may not be tomorrow but it will happen some day," he said.

Patterson also said that when the Bretton Woods institutions like the IMF and World Bank were set up, some of the G-15 members had not even obtained their independence, and had no part in the decision-making process. As such, they felt that they had to meet frequently to formulate common positions in the present moves to reform those institutions, he said.

"We have to urge our position consistently for acceptance because we believe our cause to be just," he said.

The summit was attended by eight heads of government, including Patterson and Dr Mahathir, who left later in the day for Paris for talks with French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac.

He will make a stopover in Amman to meet the new King of Jordan and will arrive in Kuala Lumpur on Monday.

-- BERNAMA

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