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PM on perspective of human rights

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - It is not just governments which should not deprive citizens of their rights. No one else too should not, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"Unfortunately when one talks about human rights invariably one thinks of the Government as the violator," writes Dr Mahathir in the foreword of his new book titled Human Rights - Views of Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Launched by Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar today, the book is a collection of 18 of the Prime Minister's speeches on human rights, compiled by the World Youth Foundation.

Syed Hamid said the most important message in the book was that independence must come with freedom.

"It is no use to be independent when we are controlled by outside powers," he said.

He said the book was a good reflection on how human rights should not only be viewed from the perspective of how governments oppressed the people but "the instances where there is oppression imposed by a country on another".

In the foreword, Dr Mahathir reasons that since societies differ in terms of development and culture, "it is unrealistic to insist that all their values and perceptions of what constitutes human rights should be identical all the time".

Syed Hamid also pointed out how the Prime Minister always stressed that the debate was not whether individual rights overrode societal ones but how "individual rights must be connected to responsibility towards society".

The book, he said, would help Malaysians to put into perspective the skewed arguments put forth by foreigners who said Malaysia's refusal to ratify certain United Nations Conventions, like the one on civil and political rights, was reflective of a failure in these areas.

"We will ratify and sign the conventions according to our needs and when we feel it is appropriate."

Syed Hamid said Malaysia's aim was to introduce new dimensions of human rights such as the effects of currency manipulation on a nation's sovereignty, so that these could be included in the 25 United Nations Civil, Political, Economic and Social Rights Conventions.

"Of the 25, Malaysia has signed six and ratified five," he said, adding that the country would not be rushed into signing treaties.

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