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PM slams United Nations system (HL)

A. Kadir Jasin at the United Nations

IN a scathing criticism of the United Nations' system, the Prime Minister yesterday said no change could be expected of the world body for as long as it belonged to the five permanent members.

"The structure of the United Nations will continue to reflect the glorious victory of these nations 50 years ago," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said in an address to the General Assembly.

The five UN permanent members are the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom and France.

The small member States, said the Prime Minister, would have to be content with making annual speeches at the General Assembly and the various UN anniversaries. Occasionally, they would be elected to the Security Council.

In what is seen as the strongest indictment ever of the UN since he started attending the General Assembly as Deputy Prime Minister in the 1970s, Dr Mahathir said:

"But despite at least three of the permanent five being violent advocates of democracy, there will be no democracy in the United Nations." He was referring to the US, Britain and France.

The only saving grace, he said, was the good work of the United Nations agencies.

He took to task the world body for practising what he called "rather unusual principles", and went on to cite the choice of UN human rights commissioners.

Normally, he said, in order to study, report and pass an opinion or make a judgment on an issue, a neutral or unbiased person would be chosen.

Without naming anyone, he said the United Nations had instead chosen "a person well-known for his virulent attacks against the Malaysian judiciary" to report on the institution.

The Prime Minister was clearly referring to the UN Commission of Human Rights' Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers Datuk Param Cumaraswamy.

"The United Nations then conferred on him total immunity against the laws of his country without reference to or consent of the country.

"This immunity apparently extends beyond his task of reporting his findings to the United Nations. He may publish his opinions, defame people and the subject of his study anywhere and everywhere," said Dr Mahathir.

He went on to ask: "Is there no limit to a United Nations commissioner's immunity?"

Dr Mahathir said governments everywhere were told not to interfere with the judiciary.

"Yet, in this case, the Government was expected to instruct the judiciary not to act against this United Nations Commissioner for breaking the laws of the country."

While clarifying that he was not blaming the UN Secretary-General, he found the peculiar system and principles guiding the choice of the UN commissioner (for Malaysia) unacceptable.

"Nor do I think it proper to hint of dire consequences for the Malaysian nation if this man is not freed from court action for open contempt and defamation. There is something not right here which the United Nations needs to look into," said Dr Mahathir.

He said the ability of small nations to have a public forum to freely

air their views was further curtailed by the Western media that distorted everything they said.

Obviously referring to the criticisms levelled against the Government over the six-week jailing of the Far Eastern Economic Review's Kuala Lumpur bureau chief, Murray Hiebert, by the High Court, the Prime Minister said:

"Again we are expected to give immunity to Western journalists? They may break our laws but no legal action may be taken against them."

He went on to point out that in Malaysia even the King and the hereditary Sultans were not above the law.

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