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PM calls on US to respect UN ballot result

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MALACCA, Sat. - The United States which has been voted out of the United Nations Human Rights Commission for the first time in 54 years must respect the decision of other members.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said those who were not elected should not consider the decision unfair.

"In a democratic process, there will be a time when we win and there will be a time when we lose ... so we have to accept it," he told a Press conference after attending a gathering known as Perhimpunan Perdana Warga Gerak Khas 2001 at the Sungai Udang army camp, about 15km from here today.

In the ballot in the UN Economic and Social Council on Thursday, the US received 29 votes, behind France (52), Australia (41) and Sweden (32). Only three seats on the commission were allocated to western nations.

There were also accusations that a group of nations which frequently violated human rights had ganged up to oust the US.

Asked about the significance of the US ouster, Dr Mahathir said that it was difficult to make an assessment.

"However, this time around, the other members may have thought that there were others who were more deserving to be on the panel."

On whether the outcome was due to the US tendency to comment on the human rights record of other countries, the Prime Minister said it was possible.

"But we cannot be sure ... we can only guess."

Meanwhile, his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said in Kuala Lumpur the ouster of the US was a reflection of the country's record on human rights.

He said the rest of the world would now know the true picture of the country's stand on the issue.

"Actually, there are several conventions on human rights which the United States did not sign for a long time," he said after presenting prizes to the winners of a jogathon organised by the Home Ministry at Padang Merbok yesterday.

More than 1,300 staff from the Ministry's 13 departments and their families took part in the jogathon.

He said the the US absence from the UN Human Rights Commission might not make the process of passing resolutions any easier.

"I don't think it will easy but what is important is that when it (the resolution) is tabled, we must be fair and understand the issues that are related to human rights," he said.

"Rights can also be defined as the right to enjoy the benefits from the country's development and to overcome poverty. It needs to be looked at from a bigger picture."

In Johor Baru, Malaysian Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) member Datuk Lee Lam Thye said the failure of the US to retain its seat proved that no country was exempted from human rights violations.

Lee said with globalisation and exposure through the Internet, it is almost impossible for any country to conceal human rights violations in their own country.

"The outcome of the UN ballot against the US is of no surprise, as there have been numerous incidents of violations of human rights in the US.

"What is more, the US has been ridiculing many other countries for human rights violation when it could not look after its own human rights

issues," he told reporters after flagging off the `Harmony Run' organised by S P Setia Bhd here this morning.