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KUALA LUMPUR, NOV 14/ (BERNAMA) -- DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD TODAY WARNED OF THE DANGER OF DEMOCRACY BEING DESTROYED BY THE +DISRUPTIVE CAPACITIES OF NEW CENTRES OF POWERS,+ AND STRESSED THE NEED TO OBSERVE JUDICIOUSLY THE LIMITS OF FREEDOM GRANTED TO DEMOCRATIC FORCES.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID TOO MANY COUNTRIES HAD SEEN DEMOCRACY DESTROYED BY SUCH DEVELOPMENTS.

+OF LATE NEW CENTRES OF POWER HAVE ERUPTED. PRESSURE GROUPS OF ONE KIND OR ANOTHER HAVE EMERGED WHICH NOT ONLY CHALLENGE THE EXISTING AUTHORITIES BUT ARROGATE TO THEMSELVES POWERS THAT ARE NOT LEGITIMATELY THEIRS,+ HE SAID WHEN OPENING THE EIGHTH MALAYSIAN LAW CONFERENCE HERE.

THE THREE-DAY CONFERENCE, ORGANISED BY THE MALAYSIAN BAR COUNCIL, IS ALSO BEING ATTENDED BY OBSERVERS FROM SINGAPORE, INDONESIA AND THE PHILIPPINES.

+IF NOTHING ELSE THE DISRUPTIVE CAPACITIES OF THESE PRESSURE GROUPS ARE QUITE CONSIDERABLE,+ HE SAID, ADDING THAT THE REACTION OF THE LEGITIMATE AUTHORITIES TO THE DISRUPTIVE CHALLENGES TO THEIR AUTHORITY WAS EITHER TO BECOME PROGRESSIVELY REPRESSIVE OR TO RETREAT FROM THEIR RESPONSIBILITY. -- MORE

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IF THE LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY CHOSE TO RETREAT, THE RESULT WOULD BE ANARCHY AND WOULD IN TURN ATTRACT FORCES KEEN ON SEIZING POWER, DISCARDING DEMOCRACY AND RULING REPRESSIVELY TO STAY IN POWER, HE SAID.

EITHER WAY, HE SAID, DISRUPTIVE CHALLENGES TO AUTHORITY IN A DEMOCRACY WOULD LEAD TO REPRESSION AND THE DEATH OF DEMOCRACY.

TO PRESERVE DEMOCRACY, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THE DIVISION AND THE BALANCE OF POWER AMONG THE LEGISLATURE, THE EXECUTIVE AND THE JUDICIARY MUST BE OBSERVED.

+FREE SPEECH AND A FREE PRESS DO NOT MEAN UNLIMITED LICENCE. MINORITIES TOO DO NOT HAVE UNLIMITED RIGHTS. PRESSURE GROUPS MUST KNOW WHEN TO STOP,+ HE SAID.

THE PRIME MINISTER BELIEVED THAT IF THESE WERE UNDERSTOOD AND OBSERVED THEN DEMOCRACY WOULD SURVIVE. -- MORE

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DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR ALSO SAID THAT DEMOCRACY ONCE DESTROYED, ITS RESTORATION WOULD BE VERY COSTLY FOR SOCIETY AND EVEN MIGHT NEVER BE FULLY RESTORED.

ON LEGISLATION OF LAWS, HE SPOKE OF THE NEED TO GIVE IMPORTANCE TO THE SPIRIT OR PURPOSE OF LAWS THAT WERE ENACTED RATHER THAN THE LETTER OF THE LAW.

HE REGRETTED, HOWEVER, IN THIS CASE, THE LETTER OF THE LAW WAS GIVEN MORE IMPORTANCE AND SO WAS THE PROVISION FOR INJUNCTIONS.

INJUNCTIONS WERE MEANT TO PREVENT IRRETRIEVABLE INJUSTICE, HE SAID, BUT ON TECHNICALITIES, INDIVIDUALS HAD BEEN ABLE TO HOLD TO RANSOM HUGE ORGANISATIONS, PUTTING THE LAW INTO DISREPUTE.

ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE COUNTRY'S LEGAL SYSTEM, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID MALAYSIANS WERE FORTUNATE THAT THE JUDICIARY WAS HONEST AND COMPETENT AS WELL AS INDEPENDENT OF THE EXECUTIVE. -- MORE

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+IN MOST COURTS IN TOO MANY COUNTRIES, A MAN IS CONSIDERED
GUILTY UNTIL HE IS PROVEN...INFLUENTIAL.+

HE, HOWEVER, CALLED ON THE JUDICIARY AND LEGAL PRACTITIONERS TO
COOPERATE TO IMPROVE +THE DUE PROCESS OF LAW+ IN THIS COUNTRY WHICH
HE SAID WAS SLOW AT TIMES EVEN THOUGH IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT JUSTICE
DELAYED WAS JUSTICE DENIED.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID AN EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT LEGAL
SYSTEM COULD BE ACHIEVED THROUGH COOPERATION, MUTUAL RESPECT AND
UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THOSE IN THE LEGAL AND JUDICIAL SERVICE AND
THE BAR IN LINE WITH MALAYSIAN VALUES. -- BERNAMA

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