

DR M: EVERY COUNTRY HAS A SECRETS ACT

STAR 17 NOV 1986

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad hit out at critics of the proposed amendments to the Official Secrets Act, saying that "any country that says it has no OSA is telling a lie."

He said these critics were purposely mistranslating the OSA.

"As a matter of fact, the existing laws are more extensive than the proposed amendments put before Parliament.

"The only thing is that people get over-excited by purposely mistranslating the OSA, and they also get emotional," he added.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Barisan Nasional chairman, was speaking to reporters after opening the MCA general assembly.

On fears that the OSA would be abused, he stressed: "Only in the very obvious cases of revealing classified government doc-

uments have we taken people to court.

"They have been (only) three such cases throughout the 30-year history of this independent country." (*Other OSA stories on Page 4*).

Earlier, in opening the assembly, Dr Mahathir said that Malaysia could not accept the "concept of individual freedom *a la* the West."

"An individual is free in the democracy practised here only to the extent that his freedom does not threaten society.

"In our democracy, the interests of the majority are more important than the interests of the individual," he said.

Dr Mahathir, warning that the economic recession was the major problem facing the nation, said that Malaysians were too often taken up by the "so-called democratic processes to the extent that we ignore

whether they benefit us or not."

He said that even as there were signs that the economy was recovering, there arose other issues which affect the political climate and the economy.

He stressed that the nation had gone through this process several times but there were still people who had not learnt anything from these experiences.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was special and was not similar to developed nations of Europe and the United States.

"We are also not like other developing countries. As such, if we choose a system of government and administration from other countries, we not only need to adjust ourselves to that system but also, where necessary, must adjust that system to suit our special needs.

"We have chosen democracy with freedoms which

are part of the democratic system. But democracy and freedom are of no use if they don't help bring happiness for us and help to develop the country.

"There is no benefit if a democratic system is practised but the nation is destroyed because of it.

"Democracy for democracy's sake is useless if it results in oppressive anarchy and the destruction of our society.

"It is not the system that is important. It is the good that it can bring to society that really matters," he said.

Referring to a Western statesman's comment that *I do not agree with what he says, but I will defend his right to say it*, Dr Mahathir said that in the country concerned, "they" were quick to act on those who were not in line with general opinion.

"If the Government does not act, society will act. There is no absolute free-

dom anywhere in the world.

"If this old democracy can make its own interpretation when needed, there is not a single reason why we cannot make our own interpretation.

"Let us not be quick in criticising our country as undemocratic just because we don't follow 100 per cent the practice in other countries.

"We should also not be shy in not conforming to the concepts of other nations. It is our right to determine our own form of democracy according to our country's special position," he said.

The Prime Minister said that in a multiracial country like Malaysia, there were a lot of sensitive issues which needed to be managed with diplomacy to prevent any problems from arising.

"In the Barisan, we have a way and a specific channel to discuss sensitive problems. Similarly, the Government has a specific

forum, especially for its component parties, to discuss sensitive matters.

"Through these channels and forums, we have solved several problems," he said.

Later Dr Mahathir told reporters he did not see any need for a change or a review of the democracy practised by Malaysia because "we are doing well as we are."

He also noted that in some Western countries, democracy gave the impression that everyone could do what he liked.

"If a man walks naked in the street, he is seen as exercising his democratic right.

"But here, it is the majority that is important and not individuals who want to disrupt the society.

"If anyone walks naked in the street here, he will be arrested for doing something that is against the community's norm," he said.