

# *We're still democratic, Dr M tells Americans*

From AHMAD A. TALIB

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NEW YORK, Fri. — Malaysia has survived various criticisms to emerge stable, democratic and prosperous, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Despite all the nasty things said about the country and its Government, Malaysia continues to uphold democratic principles and practices, Dr Mahathir told an American audience from the Council on Foreign Relations here today.

In an address seen as an attempt to clear some misconceptions among foreigners, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia has a proven track record. Those who have been to Malaysia can vouch for its democratic principles and practices.

Malaysia has often been accused of undemocratic practices because since independence in 1957 the Government has had the power to detain citizens without trial.

Yet today's Government is described as undemocratic although it has released more detainees and used the Internal Security Act less frequently than previous Governments.

The conclusion that can be drawn is that any current Government must be worse than previous Governments whatever the records may show.

"You must have read some reports on Malaysia which makes you wonder what is happening to the country now. But then, if you were to look at back copies of many international magazines, you will find that Malaysia had never done well in anything," Dr Mahathir said.

He said Malaysia has been described as oppressive to the Chinese and Indians from the time Tunku Abdul Rahman was Prime Minister to the present time.

Yet Chinese and Indians from other countries in the region are prepared to smuggle themselves in and pay money to become permanent residents or citizens, he said.

"The fact is that Malaysia has always been fair to

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# Lurid picture of Dr M painted by losers

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all its citizens of whatever ethnic groups. It has always been democratic. It has never been anti-foreign.

"It has always managed its economy and finances well and it has always been moderate in its international postures. Today's Malaysia is no different.

"If people care to study facts rather than listen to the disgruntled few, they would see that everything is in place.

"The magazine *Economist* warned about Malaysian Chinese taking their money out of the country. But Hong Kong Chinese, Taiwan Chinese and Singapore Chinese are coming into Malaysia to invest millions more.

"There is plenty of money in Malaysia at the moment and interest rates are low. The movement of Malaysian Chinese and their money has been going on all the time and they will continue to go on irrespective of who is Prime Minister."

## Dictator

Dr Mahathir remarked that of late, there has been much talk of a trend towards a dictatorship in Malaysia. This was started by people who lost in a bid for leadership of the governing party.

The losers have managed to paint a lurid picture of the Prime Minister as a dictator in order to win support for themselves. They succeeded and won a by-election recently.

"What does this prove? Which dictatorship allows itself to be openly vilified and to lose elections? As far as is known, dictators who bother to hold elections invariably win with 99.9 per cent of the votes cast in their favour," he said.

"In the meantime, Malaysia is booming. The first half of 1988 shows a GDP growth of nine per cent. The much maligned Finance Minister is now described as the architect of this minor economic miracle.

"Of course, the Prime Minister is still described as a profligate dictator bent on bankrupting the country. I do not mind who gets the credit and the plaudits.

"Certainly we are not perfect but which country is? However, if one looks at Malaysia objectively, you will find that Malaysia is forward looking, progressive and a vibrant democracy.

"And it is going to stay that way for a long, long time," Dr Mahathir said.