

PM: DEMOCRACY HAS THRIVED IN MALAYSIA

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BAGAN SERAI, Sun. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that it is not easy to sustain a democratic system of government but Malaysia has done it with flying colours.

He said many countries which gained independence at the same time as Malaysia had moved from a democratic platform to a one-party state.

"These countries could not go on with the business of governing as there were too many parties.

"They resorted to one-party states and dictatori-

al rule. But Malaysia has successfully maintained democracy. In fact, we are a thriving democracy," he said.

He was addressing about 15,000 people at the Sekolah Menengah Bagan Serai field here where he also launched a special programme for the poor.

Dr Mahathir said the Barisan Nasional was committed to preserving and strengthening the democratic institution in the country.

"We are not afraid to face the opposition in the election. Our track record is enough to pull us

through," he said.

He said many people tended to forget that elections were held to form a government to rule the nation.

"Some of them think elections are held as a test of individual popularity. They think it is to enable them to elect someone they are fond of.

"I wish to remind the people that electing one person may not result in the candidate's party forming the government.

"If this happens, that person whom you sayang cannot help you much. It is more important that the

ruling government secures a two-thirds majority," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that only a strong government would be able to avoid racial strife.

"I won't apologise to anyone when I remind the people of the May 13 racial riots. It is my duty to remind all Malaysians about that black day in our history.

"If the ruling government is not strong, we will not be able to have such a big multi-racial gathering today without any fear," he said.

He said that the opposi-

tion's claims that democracy was dying was unfounded as the Government had not placed any restriction on the formation of political parties.

"We recently approved the registration of new political parties. The Government also approved printing permits of newspapers and magazines without reservation.

"We have allowed party organs like *Harakah* (Pas), *Rocket* (DAP) and other newspapers which are critical of the Government to continue publishing. We are not scared to do so," he said.