

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 9 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today positive discrimination is still necessary in a world enamoured with democracy and equality for fair distribution of wealth.

Equal opportunities do not give equal results and are likely to enhance the differences, he said when opening the two-day Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting (CFMM) here.

+Asking a lame man to sprint with an athlete from the same starting point will not result in their reaching the winning post together. The likelihood is that they will be much further apart,+ he said.

The prime minister said the simplistic approach is to give everyone equal opportunities and let them achieve their own levels, and that this is +very democratic+.

But then, he said, even the most egalitarian democrats subscribe to the system of taxing the rich to provide for the poor.

+A handicap is not undemocratic. It is very egalitarian,+ he said.

+Again, to draw the same analogy, a successful operation is not good enough. The patient must survive and get well.+

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said that +even in a homogeneous society, extreme differences in wealth among its members tend to arouse envy, antagonism and conflict.

+The basis of the Communist and Socialist ideologies is the unequal distribution of wealth and the wide gaps between the rich and the poor.

+If in addition, the rich and the poor are also separated by ethnic origins, then the potential for conflict is even greater.+

Citing Malaysia as an example, he said it has all the ingredients for social conflicts and violence because it has a multiracial population separated not just by race but by economic roles and performance.

He said Malaysia is all for democracy, for the protection of human rights and the rights of workers, for press freedom and for keeping environment unpolluted.

+Malaysia practises democracy, upholds human and workers rights and strives with all its limited capacity to protect the environment. But acceptance of all these noble principles cannot always guarantee the well-being and prosperity of people and nations,+ he added.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the world is seeing a most glorious counter-revolution with the death of Communism and the birth of Democracy and the adoption of the free market system all over the world.

+But it would be naive of us all to fail to see that the initial fruits of the espousal of democracy and the free market are not the expected wealth and prosperity or even of stability and freedom from fear.

+In many of the countries of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe we are seeing increasing poverty and economic chaos, political instability and civil wars, death and destruction.+

He said democracy is great as it is the least imperfect of the systems of government devised by man.

+But please note that it is not absolutely perfect,+ he said, adding that for it to work, democracy cannot be just adopted as a system.

+To work, the people as a whole must understand how it works, how to make it work, how to be wary of its imperfections and how to handle them.+

The prime minister said it is not just governments which must practise and understand the workings and limitations of democracy but the people as a whole, political parties, non-governmental organisations and the pressure groups.

+And the same applies to human rights, workers rights, press freedom and environment protection,+ he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said: +We should use whatever leverage we have to spread the gospel of democracy, human rights, etc ... but we must be very careful, lest in our missionary zeal we destroy the very people we wish to help.

+On the other hand, we cannot stand by and watch, as dictatorships violate the rights of their people to free choice, to freedom from oppression and to sustaining human dignity.+ -- Bernama