

Know how it works before forcing

Understanding

it on others, says PM democracy

By Ahmad A. Talib

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — All believers and practitioners of democracy must understand the workings and limitations of democracy before imposing it on others, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said the practitioners of democracy should be more careful before twisting arms to force democracy and all the other noble ideas and concepts down everyone's throat.

At the opening of the Commonwealth Finance Ministers' Meeting today, Dr Mahathir said: "Democracy is great. But please note that it is not absolutely perfect.

"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. It is not just Governments which must practise democracy.

"The people as a whole, the political parties, the oppositions, the non-governmental organisations and the pressure groups they must all understand the workings and limitations of democracy.

"And the same applies to human rights, workers' rights, Press freedom and environmental protection."

In a sober address where the Prime Minister spoke out against attempts by certain groups to link trade and aid with the democratic practices of a country, the responsibility of a Finance Minister and the double standards adopted by certain countries on certain issues and matters.

"We should exercise whatever leverage we have to spread the gospel of democracy, human rights, etc. But we must be very care-

ful, 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."

On the latest attempt by certain groups which want to impose recyclable goods as a new condition to trade, Dr Mahathir said this would affect the manufactured products exported by the poorer countries.

"These countries use borrowed technology and have

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limited capacities to innovate and adjust to new conditions. Since the poor countries are also the producers of the raw materials for manufactured goods, recycling will reduce the demand for the raw materials involved, thus making the poor countries even poorer.

"The linkages between trade and aid with the democratic practices of a country should not be selective. Friends or foes should not count. It would be a mockery or farce if friends can get away with dictatorship and oppression while those who are not friendly and given to plain speaking are subjected to the proposed pressures."