

Mahathir slams 'one-sided', BBC interview

17 OCT 1991

HARARE, Oct 16

MALAYSIA, as an independent and sovereign country, has the right to govern the country in a way the people want it to be (governed). And this is determined through elections. "If the people do not want us, obviously we are not going to win in the elections," according to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

But according to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Malaysia and a number of other Commonwealth countries do not appear to be democratic and do not have a good government.

"They feel that unless we fleam up our job, we should not be in the Government," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said, adding that: "This is quite a proposal... it will mean that the Commonwealth as it is today will not exist and will revert to the kind of Commonwealth that existed before the modern Commonwealth when there were five countries — Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa."

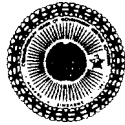
Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said: "I feel that it is a bit racist on the part of the BBC." However, he added that he was not surprised when the BBC suggested this kind of Commonwealth. "They seem to think they have a right to draw up conditions and rules and if we don't fulfill or adhere to we should opt out," he said.

The BBC interviewed the Prime Minister over the telephone and the questions "were so skewed in order to achieve the objective that Malaysia is not democratic and that other Commonwealth countries do not live up to their standards, and that things should be cleaned up to make themselves democratic". The Prime Minister described the interview as being "one-sided".

The BBC in its interview made direct reference to Malaysia and some African countries that, according to them, did not practise democracy and good governance. They cited the laws, adding that the Malaysian Government detained people without trial.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said he pointed out to the BBC that it was a British law which had been adopted. But they seem to think that it is alright for the British to do so but not for Malaysians. "I can't understand this double standard. But I am prepared to accept that this is an expression of the freedom of the press, and the BBC has the freedom to twist the news in a way that will blacken other people's names."

On democracy, the Prime Minister said he pointed out that "we have to be very specific about what we mean by democracy. The definition of democracy changes with time. If you take Britain



CHOGM
ZIMBABWE 91
16-22 October

100 years ago, even 50 years ago, it doesn't qualify as a democracy as it is defined now. Similarly, one country's democracy is not the same as another's. So, it is very important that we define the basic rules and then if anybody conforms to those rules, then we should consider them as democratic".

Malaysia, he said, is a member of the Commonwealth as it subscribes to the basic fundamentals of the Commonwealth. But the BBC appears to think that "they have the right to draw up rules and conditions and that if we do not adhere to their conditions, we should opt out".

"If that is the feeling, then of course, we must accept because we believe in being in the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth as it is today. But if the Commonwealth is going to be exclusively for people who claim they are the sole practitioners of democracy, good governance, they subscribe to human rights, then of course we may have to rethink.

"If the Commonwealth reverts to the old dominance, and that is their wish, how can we object?" the Prime Minister asked. He added that the views expressed on the subject were those of the BBC.

As for the 10 Heads of Government represented in the High Level Appraisal Group (HLAG), there is no difference over the question of good governance and human rights. Their views, including Malaysia's as chairman of the HLAG, will be reflected in the Harare Commonwealth Declaration.

Asked whether the views expressed by the BBC reflected the official British Government stand, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said it is not the view of the Government (British). However, the BBC has a world audience and when the BBC takes up something like this, it is bound to influence people's minds against countries like Malaysia.

For example, some American writers described Malaysia as "a corrupt, totalitarian country" and this has caused a lot of US investors to shy away from Malaysia. "While we can say its part of press freedom, we cannot avoid the fact that this influences people adversely against us," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir added. —

By Hardev Kaur