

Dr M: BBC view a bit racist

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From Calvin Goh

HARARE, Wed. — The British Broadcasting Corporation said many members of the Commonwealth, including Malaysia, do not seem to have good governance, and told them to clean up their job to stay in Government.

It named a lot of countries whose performance was contrary to good governance. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said here today.

This was the impression Dr Mahathir obtained from a telephone interview with the BBC last night.

Speaking to Malaysian newsmen after attending a working breakfast hosted by the Commonwealth Games Federation at the Harare International Conference Centre this morning, Dr Mahathir said the BBC's suggestion that these countries "clean up" their job would be quite a proposal.

"They felt that unless we clean up our job, we should not be in the Government," Dr Mahathir said, adding that the proposal would mean that the Commonwealth would not exist as it is today.

Instead, it would revert to the kind of Commonwealth when the members comprised only Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

Dr Mahathir said: "I felt that it was a bit racist on the part of the BBC."

However, he was not surprised when the BBC suggested to have this kind of Commonwealth. "They seem to think they have a right to draw up conditions and rules and that if we don't fulfil or adhere to (the rules) we should opt out," he said.

At this point, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia believes in being in the Commonwealth in the form 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, subscribe to human rights, then of course we may have to rethink."

"Of course if the Commonwealth reverts to the old dominions . if that is the wish, how can we object?"

He said the BBC singled out Malaysia as one of those countries which do not qualify because it detained people without trial although "I did point out that this is a British law which we adopted."

"But then they seem to think that it was okay when the British were there and

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not okay when the British are not there. I can't understand this double standard," the Prime Minister said.

But he was prepared to accept that this was an expression of the freedom of the Press and that the BBC had the freedom to twist the news in a way that will blacken other people's name

Asked if the BBC reflected the views of the British Government, Dr Mahathir said he did not think so.

While Malaysia appreciated this, it must also be understood that the BBC had a world audience, and that what it says may influence other people's minds against countries such as Malaysia.

The Prime Minister also referred to some American writers who described Malaysia as a corrupt and totalitarian country. This, he said, had caused some American investors to shy away from Malaysia.

While this could be part of Press freedom, one could not avoid the fact that this influences people adversely against Malaysia, he said.

Dr Mahathir also spoke on democracy, saying that Malaysia had pointed out the need to be very specific about the meaning of democracy as the definition changes with time.

The Prime Minister said: "If we take Britain 100 years ago, even 50 years ago, it does not qualify as a democracy as defined now."

"Similarly, one country's democracy is not the same as another. So it is important that we define the basic rules . and then if anybody conforms to those rules, then we should consider them democratic."

Asked to comment on the BBC interview, Dr Mahathir felt that it was one-sided.

Explaining the interview process, Dr Mahathir said he had to hold the telephone and listen to the question. He then had to put down the telephone and look into the camera to answer the question.