

Democracy cannot be rushed, says

From Calvin Goh

HARARE, Fri. — Malaysia believes in and fully supports democracy although it feels it is not the perfect system.

This point was made by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when he spoke at the executive session of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) here yesterday.

Briefing reporters later, Foreign Ministry Secretary-general Datuk Ahmad Kamil Jaafar said the Prime Minister also noted that "it was far more important for the community to have rights, and that the minority should not subvert the rights of the majority."

He said Dr Mahathir felt if one believed in democracy then he or she would have to accept that democracy

meant "if not consensus, at least majority rule".

If democracy is to be promoted, the people must learn to understand that the process can only be absorbed slowly.

Dr Mahathir had said that modern democracy in the West reached their present stage over a period of more than a hundred years.

"Therefore, how can one expect a country which has

never known democracy to suddenly become democratic and to be able to give their people all the things they expect to get from democracy?"

The Prime Minister pointed out that when Malaysia was under colonial rule there was no democracy. But on the day the British flag was lowered, the country was told that it must practise democracy.

"And this is not the democracy of a hundred years ago but the democracy of today."

Dr Mahathir said that most of the countries which became independent adopted democracy but most of them failed to make it work as they had no experience.

They then reverted to some form of "more or less" authoritarian rule and now they are being accused of

Dr Mahathir

not being democratic enough.

Dr Mahathir felt that the critics should learn why this happened and to help these countries.

He felt that democracy should not be based on mere belief.

Unless one knows how to make democracy work, it is not going to work.

He therefore called for tolerance and an examination

of the problems that had been faced by some of the countries which seemed to be undemocratic.

He also said that the world should develop a problem-solving mechanism.

Datuk Ahmad Kamil said that Dr Mahathir's speech was well received by the delegates as most of them felt he was echoing their feelings.