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Mahathir-Malaysia

WE OWE SUCCESS TO OUR BRAND OF DEMOCRACY, SAYS MAHATHIR

from Abdul Rahman Sulaiman

BEIJING, May 11 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says some of the many Western critics of Malaysia's policy have now quietly admitted their mistakes and acknowledged that the country is one of the very few examples of societal restructuring which others should follow. *overseas trips*

Although he did not name them, the Prime Minister said many countries were now advised to look at Malaysia's example of marrying dynamic and sustained economic growth with massive wealth redistribution and dramatic advances towards socio-economic egalitarianism between ethnic and social groups.

In his keynote address to the world's top corporate leaders at the 1994 China Summit Meeting here, Dr Mahathir recalled that in the 70s and 80s, Malaysia was villified and ridiculed for its New Economic Policy.

The policy, introduced in the aftermath of racial riots in Kuala Lumpur in 1969, was aimed at eradicating poverty and restructuring the Malaysian society to ensure greater social justice.

He recalled: "We were constantly badgered and advised to give it up. We were constantly scolded even by people who were themselves busy redistributing wealth in forceful ways, for example, by nationalisation or affirmative action. -- more

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"We tinkered. We fine-tuned. We amended. We changed what did not work. We went fast track. We slowed down. And, in the end, after it had achieved much of what we aimed for, we decided not to extend it but to formulate a slightly improved version which we called the National Development Policy."

To outsiders then, Malaysian leaders were regarded as stubborn, obstinate and recalcitrant; who refused to listen and to accept good advice.

"And, of course, they say in the tone of the 'I told you so' critics that we had failed and been forced to change course," he said.

Dr Mahathir said for what it was worth, Malaysia's success could not have been achieved without a democratic system of government; the particular form of democracy it was now practising.

"Had we simply taken -- lock, stock and barrel -- a different democratic system that might have worked well elsewhere, we might today be in deep trouble," he added.

Admitting that Malaysia's form of democracy was still far from perfect, he said the government had specifically identified "advance towards a more liberal democracy" as one of the nine general plans under Vision 2020. -- more

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Dr. Mahathir said that for a very long time, most of what was now Malaysia lived under a system in which the people had to ask for "advice" from the imperial power before they could do anything.

Under this system, all advice solicited or unsolicited had to be followed, he added.

Looking at Malaysia's history, it could be seen that it was the Western countries which fought against giving the Malaysian people freedom and democracy, he said.

In the last couple of hundred years, the only authoritarian rule Malaysians had known was British authoritarian rule which was spaced out for a brief period by the Japanese totalitarian rule.

Dr. Mahathir said Malaysia was extremely fortunate that since its independence 37 years ago, it had been a successful democracy.

He added: "If you care to look around, you will notice that the political switch from authoritarian governments to independent democratic governments is not easily achieved.

"If you throw in a multi-racial population, the switch may not be achieved at all." -- more

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He pointed out that all the nine democratically-elected central governments of Malaysia since independence had been unashamedly community oriented; which did not believe that the rights of individual come before the rights of society.

He said: "In our elections, large percentages turn out to vote. Our majorities are not silent as in some western democracies. We do not have constant, ultra-combative, confrontationist politics. There has always been a strong consensual impulse.

"Our press do not believe that it is their job to hound politicians, to tell lies and to adopt at all times the superior stance of king-makers.

"The people want enough Opposition Members of Parliament so that the Administration is kept on its toes." -- Bernama

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