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'Discipline a must for democracy'

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THE question of mob rule, freedom and democracy surfaced again when MPs debated the Supply Bill 1999 yesterday.

Ruhanie Ahmad (BN-Parit Sulong) said lately, the terms "democracy" and "freedom" had been used indiscriminately to legitimise actions that seemed intended for killing democracy.

He said in the name of democracy, foreign media reports had given the impression that the nation was gripped by emergency, while some foreign powers sought to interfere in the country's domestic affairs.

While freedom was ever present in the various interpretations of "democracy", this was accompanied by limitations and discipline, he said.

This was a universal reality aimed at bringing well-being, harmony, peace and security. Therefore, he said, freedom should be blended with culture, ethics, discipline, regulations, tact and humanity - values which must not be overlooked when exercising freedom to seek the truth and justice.

"I hope all quarters will understand this elaboration. Law enforcers are authorised and free to enforce laws appropriately. Those seeking the truth and justice have the right to do so. Those who are oppressed have the right to free themselves from oppression.

"Thus, rights and freedom cannot be denied or questioned," he said. However, rights and freedom must go with discipline.

He said the same applied to Internet users when exercising the cyber-democracy in disseminating information and acquiring information. "Why should we believe information which is not true?" he asked.

Also on the question of democracy, Mohamad Sabu (Pas-Kubang Kerian) said the Government would have to prove that it was truly democratic by allowing gatherings and rallies.

He said the Pas' newsletter Harakah and the DAP's newsletter Rocket should be given licence so that they would become national dailies.

He believed most of those who were dissatisfied now were those in the middle class.

"These demonstrators are of a different breed ... they keep coming back despite the tear gas and water cannon," said Mohamad.

He also spoke on American double standards in handling the crisis in Kosovo, saying that Serbian forces were being given more time to withdraw which was unlike the immediate strike against Iraq.

"In this context, I agree with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that Nato will not launch the air strikes (against Serbia)," he said.

Michael Lisa Kaya (BN-Bukit Mas) recounted that a village headman, during a dialogue in which the demonstrations in Kuala Lumpur were raised, said, "To me, Malaysia is Mahathir and Mahathir is Malaysia."

He said this showed that the people in Bukit Mas, Sarawak, would continue to rally behind Dr Mahathir.

Dr Maximus Ongkili (PBS-Bandau) said Dr Mahathir's assurance that the people could change the Government through the ballot box was reassuring.

However, he said, the voter registration and electoral rolls must be free from any anomalies. The rolls must be displayed in all constituencies and not only at the District Offices, and those who registered must be qualified.

He urged the Election Commission to take the matter seriously. "To us in

PBS, this is a full-time job."