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Mahathir-Democracy

ENSURE CONTINUED PEACE AND PROSPERITY, SAYS MAHATHIR

SHAH ALAM, Oct 14 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the people must uphold the country's democratic system to ensure continued peace and prosperity.

The Prime Minister said democracy could not develop on its own if the people did not understand it and strive to make it a success.

The people must realise that the peace did not come just like that but something which they had to strive for, he said when addressing some 5,000 people at the national-level Unity Day 1998 at the Dewan Jubli Perak, here.

Dr Mahathir said that until recently there was no attempt to disregard democracy or the courts because the normal practice was to make use of proper channels to voice dissatisfaction.

"Riots, demonstrations and other unbecoming behaviours are not the ways Malaysians do things," he said.

He said the prevailing peace in the country had enabled the people to lead a complete life, going anywhere they wanted for food and recreation without being harassed because there were no riots.

Speaking at a news conference later, Dr Mahathir said certain quarters now seemed not to favour the democratic ways and rule of law.

"They are trying to switch to mob rule and street justice, resolving problems through show of might and chaos," he said.

He said that if the country was headed towards such direction, there might not be peace and the people would suffer because "if one party can do it, another party can also do it...there will be clashes."

In Malaysia, he said if a person was found guilty by the court he could still appeal to higher courts and he must accept the final decision.

If a person felt that he was victimised, there were avenues for him too, he said.

Dr Mahathir said the laws were fair on everyone irrespective of the status of offenders including Cabinet ministers.

Dr Mahathir said the court had on numerous occasions sentenced persons holding high office in the government and the decision was made without considering their positions.

"Death sentence has also been imposed on a minister but the Cabinet or the party did not object. We respect the court's decision," he said.

He said the people respected the law and if they were not happy with it they would amend it in Parliament.

He said it would not be proper if there were people wanting justice only when it did not involve them. "Then there would be justice for others but not oneself," he said.

He said a person who committed wrong would not want to admit guilty and asked to be punished.

The Prime Minister said the people of various communities, cultures and religions in the country have been united for years and this was proven when the country hosted the 16th Commonwealth Games last month.

"This could be seen when they gave applause as our athletes marched into the stadium...they stood at attention and sang the national anthem together without being told by anyone," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the strong unity among the people prevailed even when the country was facing economic downturn.

"This is different in a neighbouring country which experienced rioting, violence and terrible crimes," he said.

He said that in any community, unity could be achieved through respect of one's neighbours and their sensitivities.

-- BERNAMA

RAZ ABG