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Mahathir-Democracy

OPPOSITION WILL CURB DEMOCRACY IF THEY RULE, SAYS MAHATHIR

MELAKA, Aug 10 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the opposition should be grateful to the governing Barisan Nasional (BN) for upholding the democracy which the coalition's predecessor, the Alliance, had put in place since Independence.

It was through sustaining this very democracy that the BN could accord the opposition the opportunity to contest in the country's general elections, he said addressing a meet-the-people rally here.

Dr Mahathir, who is BN chairman, said the governing coalition still adhered strongly to democracy and willingly returned the mandate to the people every five years.

"Should the opposition be chosen, will they retain democracy? I don't think they'll let the people have the right to pick their leaders," he said.

This was because the opposition "were not at ease" with democracy even when they were not in power, he said.

Dr Mahathir cited a PAS' threat to ban all newspapers that it perceived as anti-opposition should it rule the country.

"These are the people who want democracy for themselves but will close down the media when they are in power," he said.

Had it not for the Alliance and now the BN, there would not be democracy in the country, the prime minister told the 15,000-strong crowd at the rally held in Tangga Batu here.

He said the country had a feudal system followed by British colonial rule which totally ignored the people's rights before the Alliance, comprising UMNO, the MCA and the MIC, formed the government.

"When we (the Alliance) took over, we upheld the democratic system.

"It was the Alliance that chose democracy. Not the opposition, not PAS. The DAP did not even exist then," he said in a speech punctuated by cheers of "Hidup Barisan, Hidup Mahathir" (long live Barisan, long Live Mahathir) from the crowd.⁶

The prime minister said opposition parties flourished to this day because the Alliance had introduced democracy to the country.

Dr Mahathir said because of its strong belief in democracy the BN even tolerated street sale of PAS' official organ Harakah and DAP's Rocket although they were strictly for circulation among party members.

Yet the BN government still did not act against them although they had blatantly violated the law especially the condition for the publications' permit.

"We're far more democratic than them," he said reacting to opposition allegations that the BN government was curtailing their freedom of expression.

He criticised the DAP and its secretary-general Lim Kit Siang for alleging that the BN government did not practise democracy whereas "it is they who are not democratic."

Dr Mahathir said Lim had ridiculed all court decisions involving the DAP and Lim's son Guan Eng, alleging that they were made at the government's instructions.

(Guan Eng is currently serving an 18-month jail term for offences under the Sedition Act and the Printing Presses and Publications Act.)

"But when the court convicts us (the government and BN leaders), he never claims that the decision is unfair or that the court is cruel.

"Kit Siang obviously judges not the judicial system but who gets convicted," said the prime minister emphasising the independence of the Malaysian judiciary "which does not pick and choose according to colours and feathers."

"The same court had declared Umno illegal," he said.

He said Lim's criticism of court decisions involving his party and choosing "to shut his mouth" when court decisions affected the government showed that the DAP practised double-standard.

Dr Mahathir and wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali then left for Kuala Lumpur after a two-day working visit to Melaka.

-- BERNAMA

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