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`Champions' only in name (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Government will not entertain allegations of human rights abuse by so-called champions of the issue who not only made false claims but were also guilty of the same.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said those who accused Malaysia of being undemocratic were guilty of oppressing the rights of the indigenous people in their countries.

The Prime Minister said the list of abuses committed by the so-called champions included:

- * Not paying compensation after appropriating land belonging to the indigenous people;
- * Not giving heed to the voice of the majority in international forums;
- * Violating the rights of sovereign states by kidnapping their citizens and then putting them on trial under the laws of their own country;
- * using police to beat up demonstrators, chaining the limbs of their prisoners and fitting them with electronic gadgets that caused electric shocks that could kill; and,
- * their police opening fire without thoroughly checking and causing the death of innocent people. They later aggravated the situation when their courts found the police officers not guilty and set them free.

Pledging loyalty to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong on the occasion of the King's birthday at Istana Negara today, he said the people who abused human rights elsewhere were "violent and cruel".

Likening their character to a Malay proverb pukul dulang paku serpih, katakan orang, kita yang lebih, the Prime Minister said they had no right to assess the level of human rights or justice in other countries.

The fact that the Government conducted general election every five years without hitches was testimony that democracy was alive in Malaysia.

He said although the Opposition could win power in certain States, Malaysia was still labelled undemocratic.

The allegation that Malaysia did not practise democracy and violated the rights of its people was actually made by those with bad intentions, he added.

"They want to weaken our Government by bringing its credibility in the eyes of the world into question."

Dr Mahathir said the fact that Malaysia was respected and had influence over many developed and developing nations for its effective foreign policies made it unpopular with countries which exploited weak independent nations.

"In return, their leaders and their media never acknowledge our many achievements," he said. "They have never accepted the fact that Malaysia is uniquely a multiracial country with diverse religions, cultures and races but free of racial riots."

Dr Mahathir said these countries also did not acknowledge the fact that Malaysia was able to successfully address its economic woes without their guidance or assistance.

The same countries, he said, refused to accept the fact that Malaysia was the most developed among developing countries with an effective administration.

"Although there is bribery (in Malaysia)," he said, "it is not widespread and has not affected the administration of this country."

He also dismissed the notion that major infrastructure projects had

adversely affected financial administration, adding that savings had increased by 50 per cent.

Dr Mahathir said that while the Government would continue to uphold democratic principles, the right to free speech was contingent on the fact that the people did not violate the democratic rights of others.

He said Malaysia's foreign policy would reflect its commitment to justice in international relations.

On the economy, he said all Government projects shelved due to the economic problems had been revived.

Business and trade registered a handsome growth with the surplus in balance of payment increasing to RM72 billion in 1999, he said.

Economic growth for this year was forecast at 5.8 per cent.

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