

07 OCT 2000

Rais-Judiciary

RAIS DEFENDS MALAYSIAN JUDICIARY AT CAMBRIDGE CONFERENCE

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 7 (Bernama) -- The Malaysian legal and judicial system may not be the Supreme Court of the United States or the House of Lords but it is still the bastion of rule of law for all Malaysians, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim said.

Rais said a decision of a court of law of a country that did not fulfil the expectation of certain people inside or outside the country did not automatically disqualify that country from being recognised as democratic and bound by the rule of law.

Likewise, he said, just because the leader of a nation was strong and robust in his views with respect to government and the governed did not at once make him a dictator or putting aside altogether the rule of law.

"Granted the Malaysian judiciary has its share of inadequacies but this does not mean that some of its decisions render the whole system unworthy," he said at the 'Malaysia at the New Millennium' conference at Cambridge University in Britain.

The text of his speech entitled 'Democracy and Civil Liberties in Malaysia: Shaping the Way Forward' was released here today.

He said when Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was found guilty of corruption and sodomy charges by the Malaysian court of law, American and Australian leaders, among a select few, were quick to denounce that it was a political ploy to rid the former deputy prime minister.

The Anwar case and the judicial approach involved, said Rais, exuded so much interest from outside Malaysia as if the country's former number two was accredited to the White House.

He said critics should know that Malaysian courts in the past had found guilty some of the country's luminaries including cabinet ministers, chief ministers, top civil servants, a member of the royalty and a former Umno secretary-general.

"Perhaps the international people ought to be informed - Malaysian law prohibits and condemns homosexuality...it may be an accepted norm in the West but Malaysia will continue to be an exception to that.

"Asian and Islamic sanction against it have been in place and it will for a long time persist," he said.

The minister said no apologies needed to be offered for the operation and outcome of the Malaysian democratic and legal system despite hard and high-handed criticisms from afar.

"Of course, views could be expressed with regard to the way things are done or affairs managed. After all, no one country could pass the test of perfection," he said.

Rais also said there was no such thing as an international norm in determining the acceptable and just system of a country.

"What we have, however, is only a high-handed branding by certain forces that happen to have a distaste for views from an Asian leader like (Prime Minister) Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who dares to call a spade a spade and who says things as they are and as they ought to be," he said.

He said variations of democracy the world over ought to be tolerated provided that a country's democratic system sustained a rule of law environment.

Democracy, he said, rested on and should be looked at from multi-viewpoints such as the quality of life being enjoyed by the people, the rights that existed and above all, the government which was the result of a legally and democratically constituted framework.

Rais said a walk in the heart of Kuala Lumpur any time of the day or night would drive home the point that Malaysia was a nice and safe place where the fruits of democracy and rule of law had bred a happy multiracial

society.

The minister also said where there was no authority hitherto in Malaysia to deal with and surmount human rights violations, there was now one in place with the introduction of the Human Rights Commission Act 1999.

He said the criticism that the definition of human rights under the act was not universal enough was no justification for saying that Malaysia was oblivious to the dignity of man.

Malaysia's success in handling poverty, welfare and housing as well as its almost full employment status, among others, spoke of contextual human rights achievements, he said.

Rais said: "We even treat illegal immigrants with respect and decorum much to the chagrin of many Malaysian citizens. We don't seize land belonging to foreigners. In fact, we develop vast tracts of Malaysian soil with foreign capital and expertise.

"Thus American, British, Japanese and other big players in Malaysia find solace and make money for their respective companies. The Malaysian way has served the Malaysian people well," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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