

17/07/2001

Dr Mahathir repeats call for continued peace and harmony

Farush Khan; M. Jeffri Razali

MALACCA, Mon. - Twenty years after taking office, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight repeated his call for continued peace and harmony in the country.

"This is Malaysia. People of various races can have dinner in an open space like this, safe and secure in the knowledge that they can do so in peace."

The Prime Minister said this at a gathering attended by more than 25,000 people at Dataran Sejarah in Ayer Keroh.

Chief Minister Datuk Wira Mohd Ali Rustam, as chairman of the State Barisan Nasional, hosted the dinner.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said the Government would not apologise for detaining a small group of people for the sake of the country's security.

He said if left unchecked, their actions in trying to topple the Government through street demonstrations would only lead to loss of life and limb.

The Prime Minister said if the Government only reacted after lives were lost, then the Government would be blamed for not being wise in its actions.

He said the Government had to resort to preventive detention to protect the nation's 22 million people from becoming victims of riots.

Dr Mahathir said that while the Government upheld democracy, it did not mean that there should be no limit to it.

He said democracy should be practised without adversely affecting the rights of the majority.

"If there are people who threaten (with violence) to jeopardise the safety of the people, then the Government will continue to take preventive action to maintain peace."

The Government had to do this to ensure that the people continue to benefit from the fruits of development.

Dr Mahathir said the BN Government was responsible to the nation and would take appropriate action even though it might not be popular.

"We will not sacrifice the interest of the majority. Protecting the majority of the people is our responsibility," the Prime Minister said.

He added that the Government would not neglect its responsibilities although it was being criticised by outsiders.