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It is peace and prosperity that count

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I REFER to Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad's column "On the Record" (NST, Jan 9). I am honoured that I was quoted in reference to his article on Myanmar.

However, I think one part of the quotation was taken out of context and could easily be misconstrued. My argument simply was that if the West's stand against Myanmar is based on democracy then it should be critical of other countries, and not single out Myanmar.

I merely wanted to show that Brunei, like many other countries, has a non-democratic system yet it has not been criticised by the West, which shows its double standards. I also said that I am not here to judge Brunei, for what it does is entirely up to it.

One could use many other examples, including Asean members such as Vietnam.

I take this opportunity to clarify my views on Brunei. Having been privileged to visit Bandar Sri Bagawan a few years ago, in fact, been invited to deliver a number of lectures to military officers, I would like to say how much I respect the country and its system, which has served its people and its interests well.

To me democracy is not the most important factor - it is really peace and prosperity. Brunei has achieved both and the people are contented, for they enjoy much more than those who live in so-called democratic systems.

Many of the amenities are free and they do enjoy a high standard of living. These are far more important to me than mere democracy. I once argued that you cannot eat democracy with chips, or in our case, with rice.

It is equally important to have stability, and this has been achieved in Brunei and there are no signs of this waning. In this respect, Brunei is far more successful than many other countries that claim to be democratic yet do not enjoy stability.

India, for instance, may claim to be the largest democracy in the world, yet killings, senseless at times, hatred, poverty and deprivation prevail.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad himself commented on this upon the demise of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi when he expressed sadness that such an assassination had taken place in the largest democracy.

In my book, being democratic or not means little without delivering the goods to the people.

We have also seen how people living in non-democratic systems crave for democracy and we have seen how this has been achieved in several countries lately.

I wonder whether given the choice, they would prefer the status quo, rather than democracy without stability and a livelihood. We hear of how basic necessities could run out with democracy.

Again, I am not in the habit of passing judgment on peoples and on countries. Each will need to determine its own future and destiny. In this respect, I think Brunei has done well for its people and kudos should be given to the monarchy for its benevolence.

Therefore, as the expression goes, "Why fix it when it ain't broke?"