

Make the world safer through friendship, says Dr M

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WASHINGTON: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called for the world to be made safe again through greater understanding between people and friendship between them.

He said people now lived in fear and no longer felt safe even when flying short distances.

"We cannot even be sure that, innocent though we may be, we will not be the target and victims of terror attacks," he told a gathering at

the launch of the US Congress' Malaysia-American Friendship Caucus at Capitol Hill yesterday.

"The world may not think of one life lost, but if it is our life that is lost, we have lost everything," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the world could be made safe if instead of subscribing to the idea that terror could be fought with terror, "we revert to achieving greater understanding between people and the building of friendship between them."

He said the US and Americans were the most liked people not so

long ago. "In Malaysia, we were grateful to America because we were largely liberated from Japanese occupation by Americans. Americans were our heroes and our friends."

He said that after independence in 1957, Malaysia welcomed the US Peace Corps, who did immense work to seal the friendship between Malaysians and the people of developing countries with America.

The US became the best friend of colonial people seeking independence and their friend and guide

after independence.

"I would be lying if I say that the world still sees the United States as a friend that they knew," he said.

He said however, there was every reason and possibility for the US and the Americans to be once again the universal friend of the world.

"All that is needed is to be more gentle when faced with recalcitrant nations and people.

"People tend to respond more positively to the friendly approach than to confrontation.

"Pushed into a corner, even the

weakest will fight and victory over them will really not mean much," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that a Malaysian was asked by the United Nations to persuade Myanmar to be democratic and more conciliatory towards Aung San Suu Kyi.

"Persuasion must take time. We think we are making progress.

"The Malaysian Government has not been asked to do anything but we try to help Myanmar make the transition by assuring the military government leaders that they will

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not end in jail if they opt for democracy," he said.

The Prime Minister said one must remember that when Ershad of Bangladesh and Choon Doo-hwan of Korea were persuaded to accept democracy, they both ended in jail with Choon being sentenced to death.

"The fate of Suharto is not encouraging either for dictators to give up power in favour of democracy," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Myanmar military authority was now less resistant towards a

switch to democracy and had released a substantial number of political prisoners.

He said it was not easy for them and attempts were being made to topple the junta.

He said the West was very impatient and wanted an overnight change. Sudden change, even if it was for the good was disruptive.

"Democracy for people who are not used to it can undermine stability, resulting in even war.

"Sadly, it does not compare well with the safety and stability achieved by an authoritari-

an society. So, let there be patience. The loss of time is made up by the gain in the smoothness of the transition."

He said it was well to remember that democracy was only a means and not an end in itself. It was the good life that democracy brought that counted, not democracy per se.

Dr Mahathir said he understood Americans' anxiety to see that the freedom they enjoyed should also be enjoyed by Malaysians and other people.

"There are certain free-

doms that you enjoy that we think we can do without. We hope you can tolerate our difference sense of values.

"Let us celebrate the difference, for that is what makes the world interesting.

"If we can accept that there will always be differences between us in culture, values and opinions, then we will be more tolerant of each other. Then, we will be able to live in peace and friendship with each other.

"In fact, we can be great friends despite our differences," he said.