

Dr M: Democracy should be handled with care

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YANGON: Democracy should be handled with care or the end result might be anarchy, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said Malaysia believed in democracy but recognised that there were very many interpretations of it.

“Some countries even call themselves democratic republics but they are anything but democratic. What we know is that it is not easy to handle democracy.

“If you do not know how to

handle it, you can end up with chaos, having practically no government and that is not good for any country,” he said at a press conference after opening the Myanmar-Malaysia technology conference here yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said when countries opted for democracy, it was necessary for the process to be gradual, adding that people had to learn how to handle it.

“They must understand that democracy does not mean

the freedom to do anything you like. There are limitations to democracy. Democracy can work, only if you understand this,” he said.

He said that Malaysia’s view was that while it upholds democracy and like to see it practised, “we are also aware that the process of change must be gradual and not go straight to liberal democracy because that will be very disruptive.”

Earlier, Dr Mahathir said he had discussions with Senior

General Than Shwe, chairman of Myanmar’s State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and Prime Minister, on cooperation between the countries in technology, trade and investment.

He said he had also seen some of the products of Myanmar that could be traded in Malaysia, adding that one of the areas he was interested in was the herbal industry, to explore possibilities of jointly developing herbal treatments.

Dr Mahathir said he also

discussed with Gen Than Shwe how Myanmar was developing its progress in the democratisation of the country and Malaysia’s approach towards the country, both politically and economically.

Meanwhile, Lt Gen. Khin Nyunt, Secretary 1 of the SPDC, said that Myanmar was laying down the foundations for the emergence of a democratic state.

The third most senior leader of the military government, however, said the

democracy that Myanmar sought to build might not be identical to that of the West but would “surely be based on universal principles of liberty, justice and equality with the rule of law”.

“But such a transition cannot be done in haste and in a haphazard manner.

“The world is full of examples where a hasty transition from one system to another has led to unrest, instability and even failed states,” he said.