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Mahathir-democracy

MALAYSIA IS A WORKING DEMOCRACY, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: Zulkefli Salleh

NEW DELHI, Oct 17 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he is not ashamed of the democracy practised in Malaysia, despite accusations of otherwise by others.

He said Malaysia is in fact a democracy and a working one too because its people understand the limit and the purpose of democracy.

"Some countries called themselves democratic republics but they are not actually democratic. I know many of such countries but I don't want to name them," he said.

Dr Mahathir was fielding questions from the floor at the Indian-Asean Business Summit here after he delivered a keynote address on "Asia in 2020: Challenges and Prospects" organised by the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

He said there are many types of democracy, liberal and guided, but the most important of all is the ability to choose leaders and a government, and also the ability to topple it through the ballot box.

"Some people say when there is demonstration there is democracy. In some countries there are always demonstrations and the (trades') unions always call for a strike," he said.

He said in Malaysia the unions do not resort to strike to resolve dispute and grievances not because they are tame but because they realise that such actions would scare away foreign direct investment.

"Malaysians realise the limits of democracy," he said.

Dr Mahathir said some western press looked at developing countries and said that the "brown people" could not govern their own countries.

"The West seems to know a lot about us but nothing about themselves.

"I am not ashamed of the democracy in Malaysia. It is a democracy and a working democracy," he said.

Dr Mahathir arrived here this afternoon from Hyderabad, the start of his three-day visit to this world's largest democracy.

He was also asked on how Malaysia had developed her economy and managed to tide over the 1997 financial crisis.

The prime minister's 40-minute keynote address drew a loud applause from the Indian businessmen and so was his remarks during the question and answer session that ensued.

Afterward, he called on President Abdul Kalam and his Indian counterpart Atal Bihari Vajpayee before leading a delegation meeting.

Dr Mahathir is scheduled to depart for Islamabad tomorrow morning for a one-day visit to Pakistan.

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