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Dr M on limitation to democracy

reports on "Dewan Rakyat" by V. Anbalagan; Sharmini Darshni; June PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said democracy could not be equated with religion as the former had its weaknesses.

"Democracy cannot be implemented without taking into consideration the local situation.

"If practised blindly, the people and the country will suffer," he said.

He said it must be remembered that the West took about 200 years to achieve a liberal democratic system which they currently practised.

"However, their system too has its shortcomings. There is political corruption, manipulation of power and once in a while, a leader gets assassinated," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this in reply to questions posed by Dr Tan Seng Giaw (DAP-Kepong), Mohd Nasir Che Daud (Pas-Kuala Krai) and Tan Kok Wai (DAP-Cheras) on the state of democracy, nation building and supremacy of Parliament.

He said there would only be good administration if all parties understood and were aware of the shortcomings in a democratic system.

"So the practitioners should be careful and must avert any abuse of the system," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the interpretation of democracy varied from one nation to another.

"Some are extremely free that they allow homosexual relationships and marriage with the same sex," he said.

The Prime Minister said the basis for the system was to allow the people to elect a Government and change it if they disliked the present administration.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia faced different challenges as it was multi racial.

"While we accept the freedom to express, we must also be aware that racial sentiments could destabilise the country.

"When there are racial riots, we will lose our rights. People will be injured and killed while properties will be damaged and businesses affected," he said.

To a supplementary question from Dr Tan on how to maintain peace and practise tolerance, Dr Mahathir in jest said he should join the Barisan Nasional because it represented the interest of all parties and races.

"We can sit and discuss sensitive issues without being emotional," he said, citing the Vision School concept which was agreed upon in a very harmonious manner.

The Opposition, he said, had tried to copy the BN but failed miserably.

"There is only mistrust and hatred among them," he said.

Responding to Datuk Mohamad Aziz (BN-Sri Gading), Dr Mahathir said there would be differences of opinion in a society but there should not be much variation on basic issues.

"Malaysia is unique because all Malays are Muslims and follow the Sunni sect of Imam Shafie," he said.

He said there should be no differences among Muslims in Malaysia as far as religion was concerned.

"There can be differences in policies like how to help the Bumiputeras and forge relations with non-Muslims.

"Sadly, in the process of influencing others, there are groups which want to look for mistakes to the extent of cursing God," he said.

Dr Mahathir said although non-Muslims were the minority, most supported the policies of the Government.

"Except for the 1969 racial clashes, we never had any clashes of that nature like we see in other multi-racial countries," he said, adding that the BN gave due consideration to the needs of the Malays and non-Malays.

"The people did not support them in the past nor will they do so in the next general election," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Opposition should be grateful because there were countries which claimed to be democratic but opposition members were not given the opportunity to sit in Parliament.

"Instead they are prosecuted for various charges and convicted. They lose their status as elected representatives.

"In Malaysia they are not only vocal but are free to speak during debates," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Opposition also misinterpreted the Quran for personal gains and never admitted their mistakes.