

**Mahathir says demo only as a last resort**  
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Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that although demonstrations are a democratic right, they should only be held as a last resort.

Mahathir said this to reporters after a function in Kuala Lumpur today, when asked if the Bersih 2.0's scheduled rally on Saturday had damaged the country's reputation.

"I maintain that to demonstrate is one of those freedoms that democracy permits, but even though it may be free, it is not something which should result in damage to the country.

"If you want to have a demonstration, do it when there are no other means of getting across your views," he said.

However, the premier of 22 years said Bersih 2.0's demands for electoral reforms could be aired to the authorities in other ways.

Mahathir stated that the government's crackdown on Bersih is merely a matter of opinion, and that the government will be judged by the people come the next general election.

"I think whatever the government does will be reflected during election. If they feel the government is oppressive, then the government will lose votes," he said.

**No holds barred Q&A**

Earlier, the former prime minister delivered a speech entitled 'Transforming the Country Beyond 2020' to some 500 professors who had gathered in conjunction with the National Council of Professors' Congress.

The group of intelligentsia made no hesitation to seek the elder statesman's views on several issues, including some that would normally be deemed 'sensitive'.

To a question on why did Mahathir (right) seek to reduce the powers of the monarchs, he stated that it was necessary to prevent abuses.

"There were requests for things like logging contracts, once or twice perhaps its fine, but if always... I had to deal with their demands," he said.

Mahathir also responded to a question on race relations, saying that he believed that it is worse today than it was during his tenure.

"Last time, there seldom was talk about race, maybe because we were less democratic," he said cheekily.

The former premier attributed the problems of race relations to having cultivated a western value system in an effort to appear more open.

"Democracy is not an easy system of governance, that was why I was a dictator, of course I could not admit then, I said I was not a dictator," he quipped.

Mahathir also addressed a question on Malay privileges, stating that the NEP should be gradually phased out.

"I am sad when people mention 'ketuanan Melayu', they think that they are the 'Tuan' but living in a Malay reserve is an insult. It means I am so weak I need help, its not something to be proud of," he said.

The National Council of Professors' Congress kicked off today, bringing together some 1,000 professors from all over the country for a three-day programme.

The congress was conceived by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak and came into being on April 1 last year, serving as an intellectual body to contribute ideas as the government executes its New Economic Model.

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