

Dr M: Street protests to overthrow gov't okay if...
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Former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said that leaders who become tyrants can be overthrown by mass demonstrations if the vote does not work.

He said that leaders who cannot be criticised are “ready to do wrong things”, and while democracy allows leaders to be voted out peacefully, this democratic process can also be abused.

“Merely by voting you can overthrow a leader but when democracy is abused and they don't really practice democracy, we have no way of overthrowing the leader through elections.

"Then of course, eventually if the leader is really oppressive, it is necessary to overthrow him by other means.

"And other means, of course, includes huge demonstrations and even fighting unfortunately," Mahathir (left) said.

This contrasts with his oft-repeated stand against overthrowing governments through street demonstrations which he said spark a vicious cycle of coups and instability.

He said this while speaking to about 1,500 students and bureaucrats at the Universiti Islam Antarabangsa (UIA) today.

Mahathir, however clarified at a later press conference that he was not taking a poke at Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, who is facing much opposition after an unconvincing mandate in the 13th general election.

'I appreciated opposition'

Najib (below), who is Umno president, had in his personal capacity also filed a legal suit against Malaysiakini over critical negative comments.

“No, Najib also hears criticisms...but if his own followers do not point out if something goes wrong, they are also doing the wrong thing.

“During my time I appreciated an opposition. You need an opposition to be a mirror, so that you can see your face, whether it is ugly or not,” Mahathir said.

Earlier, in his speech, Mahathir said that Islam and democracy is compatible and that even

the prophet was a democrat as he left his succession open.

"Democracy is not alien to Islam," he said, in response to a student who asked him why and how Muslim nations can stop breeding tyrants.

The octogenarian, who was accused of governing with an iron fist during his 22-year reign as the fourth prime minister, also disagreed that Islam breeds dictators.

"Whenever somebody is well-versed in religion and understands the basic teachings of Islam, then you will not become a dictator," he said.

He also spoke of the divisive and wayward path taken by Muslim nations, which he said did not follow the Quran's injunctions closely.

Conceding that the world was now "Euro-centric" and that many such Western ideas clashed with the Quran, Mahathir said that a Muslim would therefore need to pick and choose which Western idea to adopt and which ones to trash.

Ignoring science, mathematics and technology would be a bad choice, he said, and democracy is good example of a good Western concept.

We can't close the media

At the talk, Mahathir was also urged by a student to set up an Islamic media unit at the university to counter the the world's "jewish-owned" media which allegedly spread bad influence to Muslims.

"It is a good idea but if we know our religion well, we can reject what is bad and accept what is good that's coming through the media. We cannot close the media.

"They will have the alternative media. It is impossible for us to close these sources of information," Mahathir said.

"The media is not always wrong but it is up to us to determine when the media is wrong and when it is giving us proper information."