

No party should rule forever, says Mahathir

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Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that no party should rule forever in a democratic country.

The best democracy is a two-party system where the opposition is strong enough to take over and offer an alternative to the people, Mahathir said.

"The best way is for the country to have two political parties; this would ensure that one or the other would win a majority to form the government," he said in a keynote address at the Kuala Lumpur Summit 2015.

"A weak opposition would not be effective in ensuring the government does not abuse its power.

"For good governance, the opposition must be very strong and able to offer the alternative. No party should rule forever," he said.

He pointed out that having too many political parties in a country would only cause the people to be divided and that any coalition of convenience would be weak and unstable.

"(However,) if many parties form a coalition before general election, the bigger the coalition the better, as it would still survive if a party were to pull out," Mahathir said.

The country's longest-serving prime minister went on to share his experience and views on the right way to practise democracy in a Muslim country, saying that only a few have been successful in their democratic model.

Many Muslim countries have failed in their democratic system as they do not understand the working of a democracy and the limits of democracy, he said.

"They must understand that democracy is not a perfect system. It works only when people know the limits and do not resort to violence when they are frustrated. Freedom is never absolute, there must be limits to freedom and rights," he said.

In this, the political parties and the people should accept the result of a general election and those not happy should try to make a comeback the next time.

'Give and take is very important'

"In a democracy, give and take is very important. It's important that we sacrifice some things so that the others may enjoy democracy also. If we demand that 100 percent of what we considered to be our rights be met, the others will not get what they are entitled to.

"Sometimes, violence may be needed, but violence is the last resort. We see today how, upon the urging of certain people, many Muslim countries try to overthrow the dictators and their authoritarian rulers.

"In the end, what they get is extreme instability, so much so that the situation is much worse than when the authoritarian rulers were ruling the countries.

"We see a total destruction because someone feels that the countries should be ruled in democratic way, but they went about it in the wrong way," he said.

The electorate must also understand the democratic system and law, to know how political parties manipulate the electoral process, he added.

At a press conference later, Mahathir said he made his statement in general and was not referring to Malaysia's context.

"I am talking generally about the situation in Muslim countries, not talking about Malaysia's situation at the moment," he said.

"The general impression of the Muslim world is that democracy has worked in Malaysia, so they would like to know more about Malaysia's experience."

Asked what the Muslim countries should learn from Malaysia and what they shouldn't emulate, Mahathir said, "Well, this is a long question I can't answer now. We will discuss the question in the summit."

The summit, organised by the Malaysia-Turkey Friendship Foundation, Turkish-Arab Relations Centre and Malaysia Muslim Solidarity, is a three-day summit held at Hotel Istana in Kuala Lumpur.