

Mahathir: Democracy not well understood
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Not every country is able to put the principles of democracy into practice, said former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday.

"Not everyone can practise democracy. In Malaysia, we are moderate people. In some countries, people kill each other if they cannot see eye to eye," he replied to a question on withdrawal of Western troops occupying Iraq.

Mahathir said this during a question-and-answer session with Umno Taiping division members at a function held to commemorate his contributions to the party that he helmed for 22 years, concurrently as prime minister.

He had earlier delivered a keynote address at a colloquium entitled 'Internationalising the Malays', organised by the Umno Youth international relations bureau.

He was then invited by Kamunting assemblyperson and his former political secretary Dr Abdul Malek Md Hanafiah to attend the hastily organised division function.

Mahathir said that, in the case of Iraq, the country needs a strong leader to keep it intact, even if the person may have to be 'cruel' in order to keep various ethnic and religious groups in line.

"In Iraq, the fighting between the various ethnic groups is very bad. They are willing to kill each other," Mahathir said.

Citing the example of Bangladesh, he said the people do not understand the concept of democracy and that this is the cause of frequent political turmoil.

"They elect someone to form a new government, and the rest hold demonstrations and protests to cause the downfall of the government. This is because they don't understand (the principle) of democracy - when we choose a government, we accept it," he said.

"In Malaysia, we have democracy. But sometimes, not letting one talk is not very democratic," he quipped in reference to his claim that current party leaders have intervened to prevent his presence at events.

He acknowledged the Taiping division as the first in the party to have succeeded in inviting him to a function.

"I hope nothing bad happens to you (for organising this)," he said in his address.

Mahathir has repeatedly accused the Umno leadership of exerting pressure on party grassroots to prevent him from addressing them on his criticism of the present party leadership.

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