

Democracy: Malaysia 20 years behind Taiwan
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Taiwanese political figure Shih Ming-te, well known for his 25-year incarceration for opposing the government, described Malaysia as 20 years behind Taiwan in terms of democratic freedom.

Shih, nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize this year, said Malaysia has to abandon race politics.

"I know in your constitution, certain races are given certain status," Shih told reporters after a courtesy call on PKR president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail at the party headquarters in Petaling Jaya today.

"But I think, if the young generation of Malays, Chinese and Indians in this country can accept equal rights as a common value, then the country can greatly progress democratically," he added.

Shih is in town at the invitation of the local Chinese media to speak on his political experience and democracy in Taiwan and Malaysia..

He has served 15 years for sedition and another 10 for his involvement in a pro-democracy rally.

Highlights of his political background include his involvement in a student movement to overthrow the Kuomintang government, his hunger strikes and his switches in political alignment.

The maverick politician served as chairperson of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) from 1993 to 1996.

Tears and blood

Late last year, Shih organised hundreds of thousands of protesters to take to the streets demanding Taiwanese President Chen Shui-Bian's resignation.

Asked on his take on the local political scene, Shih said the perceived high corruption in Malaysia is not unique.

He attributed corruption to a judicial system that is not independent, adding that Malaysia has "a long way to go" in terms of democratic freedom.

"Demonstrations in Taiwan are very common. But in Malaysia, it is clamped down. Twenty years ago, Taiwan is where you are now," he said.

"But after much effort, after leaders were jailed one after another, slowly the problem was solved. The seed of freedom was sown with much tears and blood, now we see flowers blooming."

He added that opposition parties have a very important role to play in the fight for freedom as they are the ones pushing for reforms and political changes.

Present at the courtesy call was PKR deputy secretary-general Dr Xavier Jeyakumar, information chief Tian Chua and political aspirant Nurul Izzah, who is Azizah's eldest daughter.

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