

Hungary, UK envoys ruffled by Dr M's roasting

■ By M.K. Megan

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Top diplomats from Britain and Hungary walked out on Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad as he was speaking on human rights here today.

At a public lecture organised by Suhakam, the Malaysian Human Rights Commission, Dr Mahathir was roasting the United States and

Britain for invading Iraq, referring to their military action as "acts of terror", when the diplomats and their officers left the ballroom of the Le Meridien Hotel here.

Commenting on the incident at a Press conference later, Dr Mahathir said: "I am sorry, but as much as they have the right to criticise me, I have the right to criticise



BRUCE CLEGHORN:
British High Commissioner



TOMAS TOTH:
Hungarian Ambassador

them. It is their right to walk out if they want."

In his speech, he had said the two nations had taken it upon themselves to invade Iraq to remove an allegedly authoritarian government.

"The result of the invasion is that many more people have been killed and injured than Saddam Hussein was ever accused of," he added.

That was when British High Commissioner Bruce Cleghorn and Hungarian ambassador Tomas Toth, and their officers,

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At a Press conference after a public lecture on human rights at a Suhakam function, former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was asked about his human rights record.

On the boycott of his talk by some activists and opposition leaders:

A: What I did (during my time as Prime Minister) was what needed to be done. If some people do not attend, it is their right.

On arrests under the Internal Security Act:

A: People forget that when I assumed the Prime Ministership I had released 23 people who were under detention. There are about 500 people still under detention but they were arrested under the previous Government and I do not like to question the previous Government. Most of those detained during my time have been released.

I hate to use the Internal Security Act but even if the ISA was not used, you have to go to court and they would say you manipulated the court.

So it is a Catch-22 kind of situation. Nothing you do is right.

On Operation Lallang:

A: Ops Lallang was not because people spoke against me. It was because they brought up issues like Chinese education and the like. Because of that, there was a lot of tension between the Chinese and Malays. So the ISA had to be used to dampen the situation.

On whether the ISA is still needed:

A: To a certain extent it is still required but it has to be used very sparingly.

On Chin Peng's request to return to Malaysia:

A: That is up to the courts to decide. But his claim that he was a freedom fighter who actually gave Merdeka to Malaysia is far-fetched. He wanted Malaysia to be independent but with him as the head and he wanted to set up a communist regime which would be an authoritarian government and I don't think Malaysians would have liked that.

GLAD TO MEET YOU: Dr Mahathir with Mother Mangalam, president of the Pure Life Society, at the conference. On the right is Suhakam chairman Tan Sri Abu Talib Othman.

Dr M: Big powers practise 'multiple standards'

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left the premises.

When contacted, Cleghorn said he had been invited by Suhakam to attend the opening of the conference.

"I accepted out of respect for Suhakam and for Tun Dr Mahathir as a previous prime minister of Malaysia," he said.

"Unfortunately, I found myself listening to abuse and misrepresentation about my country. I therefore left."

Dr Mahathir was speaking on "Human Rights and Globalisation". There was no US representative present at that time.

US Embassy Press attache

Kathryn Taylor said the embassy did not send a representative for the morning session but did for the afternoon session.

Among those who spoke in the afternoon session were former Malaysian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Tan Sri Hasmy Agam and Professor Vitit Muntharhorn of Thailand's Chulalongkorn University.

Dr Mahathir said the big powers which were supposed to save the Iraqi people had broken international laws on human rights by detaining Iraqis and others and torturing them.

"The British and American

bomber pilots came, unopposed, safe and cosy in their state-of-the-art aircraft, pressing buttons to drop bombs, to kill and maim real people who were their targets, just targets. And these murderers, for that is what they are, would go back to celebrate 'mission accomplished'.

"Who are the terrorists? The people below who were bombed, or the bombers? Whose rights have been snatched away?"

Dr Mahathir said these nations practised not just double standards but "multiple standards".

As an example, he said, Israel had nuclear weapons, but

was provided with bombers to bomb purported nuclear research facilities in other countries.

Dr Mahathir said the US and Britain invaded Iraq because they claimed it had weapons of mass destruction. But this claim was proved wrong.

"So can we accept that these big powers alone have a right to determine when to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries to protect human rights?"

Saying people in Malaysia "seem to be quite happy", he added the country did not need foreign powers to ensure there was no abuse of human rights.