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LESS DEMOCRACY
BETTER FOR INDIA'

MAHATHIR MESSAGE Citing China's example, former Malaysian prime minister says to grow faster, India needs a stronger central government and less powerful states. Too much democracy obstructs decision-making, he says

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■ Former Malaysian prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad delivering the keynote address - The Challenges in the 21st Century - at the Hindustan Times Leadership Summit in New Delhi on Friday.

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NEW DELHI: Former Malaysian prime minister, Tun Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad, on Friday said India could be China in terms of development if it was somewhat "less democratic". He also said India needs a stronger central government, a remark that cut at the core of the current political stalemate over the decision to allow foreign direct investment in multi-brand retail.

Dr Mahathir, who transformed Malaysia from being a small rubber-exporting nation to one of Asia's super economies, said India needs a powerful federal structure, but less powerful provincial governments for the country to make rapid economic progress.

"Democracy is the best form of government mankind has ever invented but it is important for the world to understand its limitations. India could be China if it were not for too much domestic politics and abuse of freedoms to protest and argue at will," he said.

"Democracy does not always ensure stability and prosperity."

The leader, who towered over his country's politics for over two decades, is best remembered for his colourful personality, frequent barbs at the West, and the authoritarian manner in which he implemented his pro-market reforms that saw Malaysia's stupendous rise as a "tiger economy". "Too much democracy, without understanding the responsibilities, can obstruct decision-making," he said later during an exclusive multimedia interview for hindustantimes.com.

A keen observer of Asian politics, Dr Mahathir cited the example of Singapore, which had done very well, economically, because of limited space for dissent.

"Sometimes democracy can paralyse decision-making because people oppose for the sake of opposition," he said to a round of applause since it resonated with the audience, especially in view of the cur-

'Govt must convince people on FDI'

KNOWN FOR pushing tough economic policies, Tun Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad said the UPA government should hardsell its plan to allow FDI in multi-brand retail. "If the Indian government thinks it (FDI) is good for the country, then it should publicise it well and launch an outreach plan to tell that it is good," the former Malaysian PM said.

"The government should explain that FDI in multi-brand retail is good for the people, not the government," he said, adding that decision-making is often a casualty in coalition governments. **HTC**

rent deadlock in Parliament.

Responding to Dr Mahathir's observations on the limits of democracy, Congress MP and minister of state for commerce and industry, Jyotiraditya Scindia said, "It all depends on whether you are running a sprint or a marathon. India is on a marathon to progress and we firmly believe in this run being a democratic progress."

Baijayant 'Jay' Panda, an MP from the opposition BJD, backed Scindia, saying India had its own model of democratic governance which of course is still evolving. Mahathir essentially underlined the need for Indian governments to strongly pursue their agenda, regardless of who was in power. Malaysia emerged relatively unscathed from the Asian financial crisis after Dr Mahathir defied the IMF to introduce controversial currency controls, which nonetheless isolated his country from the global economy.

He said countries like India and Malaysia could work around the economic crisis by finding new markets.