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Dr M: Democracy has its limits

'System can only work when people understand its implied responsibilities'

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PETALING JAYA: Democracy can only work when people understand its limitations, former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"When people think only of the freedom that democracy brings and know nothing of the implied responsibilities, democracy will not bring the benefits it promises.

"Instead, it will only result in instability, which will not allow development to take place," Dr Mahathir said in a speech delivered at the University Santo Tomas special

convocation in Manila yesterday.

Dr Mahathir was relating what he had observed in Malaysia and other countries, particularly the new democracies, which he said had desperately tried to practise democracy only to receive negative results.

"One of these countries has been unable to progress because of too much democracy," he added. "No sooner is a government elected when the losers would hold demonstrations and general strikes accusing the government of malpractice.

"The government has to deal with these disruptions and neglect the work of governing it is expected to

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carry out."

These disruptions could be so serious to cause the new government to resign, Dr Mahathir said, which caused new elections to be held only to end with the same results.

"Why has democracy not delivered the good life we had expected

of it?" Dr Mahathir asked. "Simply put, it is impossible for the people to rule themselves. There are too many of them and they cannot agree on anything.

"Government of the people, by the people and for the people will result in a stalemate, in no government at all, in anarchy."

"So what do we do?" Dr Mahathir asked. "Do we accept the failures of democracy, or do we make some adjustments and sacrifice some of the liberalism of democracy so we may extract something from the system?"

"I will admit freely that Malaysia

is not a liberal democracy," he said. "We see democracy principally as providing an 'easy way' to change governments.

"No revolution, no civil war, no Arab spring. Just vote and the government will be brought down or re-elected according to the wishes of the people."

Dr Mahathir said that in Malaysia, the candidates of Opposition parties could win, and had captured many of the state governments.

Clearly, if the people so wished, he added, they could overthrow the ruling party under the present election system.