

# PM defends Malaysia's record on democracy at Oxford

The Sun - 23/11/2019 Pg. 8



**I HAVE** never been more proud to be a Malaysian than while watching the live broadcast of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad speaking his mind in response to impromptu questions posed by the chairman of the Oxford Union and the manner he put to a stop the ferocious questions levelled at him by attendees at the dialogue session.

When Mahathir spoke, you could have heard a pin drop except for the laughter that deafened the Union Hall whenever he spiced answers to some serious questions.

The Oxford Union Debate is famous for its no holds barred speeches and the equally ferocious Q&A session between the guest speaker and the audience.

Prime Minister Mahathir defended the country's record on democracy and his past leadership in a speech at the Oxford Union in Britain.

The first Malaysian and Asean leader to be invited to address the forum, Mahathir spoke on Friday about Malaysia's politics and the general election last May.

"The election system in Malaysia is proof that we are a democratic country," Mahathir said in his address.

"Many will still dispute the election system, but what I would like to emphasise is that after Malaysia has achieved independence and gone through 14 general elections, future elections will receive much fewer disputes compared to past ones."

The grand old man said: "In terms of the people selecting its leaders, Malaysia has proven that it is democratic to that extent."

Mahathir, 93, who was known for governing with an iron fist during his first tenure as prime minister from 1981 to 2003, conceded that the country had draconian laws like the now-repealed Internal Security Act, which allowed for detention without trial and could be abused by the government against dissenters.

"There may be some things that did not conform to the democratic ideals, such as the ISA law," he said, referring to it as a statute "inherited ... from our colonial masters" that was intended to guard national security.

He noted that he himself was called a dictator during his leadership.

"I would just like to point out that in the history of nations, there has not been a single dictator who stepped down while he was in power and allowed others to take over from him," he said.

"Dictators don't usually resign or retire."

Asked by Oxford Union President Daniel Wilkinson about Malaysia's decision to ban Israeli athletes from taking part in the World Para Swimming Championships to be held in Sarawak in July, Mahathir said that Israelis should not come to Malaysia as the country does not have diplomatic relations with Israel.

According to Reuters, Israel had

condemned the decision on Thursday, and said the decision was inspired by Mahathir's "rabid anti-Semitism".

"I can't understand this. We talk about freedom of speech and yet you cannot say anything against Israel, against the Jews. Why is that so?"

"If we are free to say what we like, we can say it, but we are being regarded as anti-Semitic ..."

An attendee from Singapore was not satisfied with Mahathir's response on the intrusion of the mentri besar of Johor into one of the rocks next to the one mentioned in the famous ICJ case. (The World Court had awarded one of the rocks to Malaysia.)

The mentri besar, on behalf of the Malaysian government, was clearly exercising Malaysia's right to visit that rock as it is on record that we plan to build a structure on it.

The Oxford Union is one of Britain's oldest debating societies with a majority of its members from Oxford University.

In his presentation, he only referred to his memory (unlike his host and the attendees who questioned him, most of whom had written notes to shoot their questions).

At the end of the day, he was given a long standing ovation.

And astonishingly, there were no boos directed at him.

**Dr Yaacob Hussain Merican  
Petaling Jaya**